WYNDHAM'S PAL

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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It looked as if the Mulatto knew this.

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(*Wyndhams Pal.*)

WYNDHAM'S PAL

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of
"The Buccaneer Farmer," "The Girl from Keller's," "Brandon of the Engineers," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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Sylvia Bank

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Sylvia Burch

PART I

THE LURE OF AMBITION

WYNDHAM'S PAL

CHAPTER I

THE COMMODORE'S CUP

Sylvia Burck

THE breeze had dropped as the tide ebbed, and *Red Rose* plunged languidly across the shining swell. Faint mist obscured the horizon and the yachts engaged in the fifty-mile race had vanished, although Wyndham thought he had not long since distinguished a sail in the distance. He was curious about this because if he had seen canvas it was *Deva's,* and her skipper had probably seen *Red Rose.* The rest of the fleet was scattered about to the north. Wyndham had noted their positions carefully before the haze rolled up. He wanted to win and meant to leave nothing to chance.

In the meantime, the yacht crept slowly through the sparkling water, close-hauled to a light wind that Wyndham knew would not last. Her canvas, tapering in a tall white pyramid, swayed with a regular heave against the sky. In her shadow, the sea was a cool, luminous green, but the sun was hot and Wyndham had taken off his coat. He wore a white jersey, blue trousers, and very neat white shoes. His age was twenty-six, his figure was thin but athletic, and the molding of his face was good. On the whole, he was a handsome man and was generally marked by

a careless, twinkling smile. The smile, however, was to some extent deceptive, and at times his blue eyes were hard. Wyndham was popular; he had a way of inspiring confidence, and knew and used his talent.

Marston, who sat on the yacht's coaming, splicing a rope, trusted Wyndham far. Marston's round face was burned red and generally wore a look of tranquil good-humor; his mouth was large and his eyes were calm. People thought him dull and he was not clever, but Wyndham knew his comrade's stability. Although Bob was honest and trustful, he was firm. It was characteristic that the splice he slowly made was very neat.

Their paid hand was occupied at the clanking pump, for *Red Rose* had shipped some water while the breeze was fresh. This was not remarkable, since the boat was small, but Wyndham knew, though Marston did not, that a quantity of water had come in between her working planks. She was old and needed repairs Wyndham could not afford. For all that, he hoped to win the Commodore's cup. He had particular grounds for wanting the cup, and Wyndham's habit was to get what he wanted.

"I think the splice will stand," Marston said, throwing down the rope.

"Your work does stand," Wyndham remarked.

"Oh, well," said Marston, deprecatingly, "I'm slow, but I like a good job. Saves time in the end, because you needn't do the thing again."

"You're a philosopher, Bob. My plan is generally hit or miss. But can you see *Deva?*"

Marston searched the horizon. The gently heaving sea was empty and *Red Rose* alone in a misty circle

Sylvia Burck

three or four miles across. Except for a few razorbills, nothing but the ripple she trailed broke the reflection of the calm sky. Then his glance, traveling north, stopped and fixed on something faintly distinguishable against the thin mist.

"No," he said, "I don't see her. Thought I did some time since but she's faded. What's that in the distance on our starboard bow?"

"It's hard to tell. Might be a big black-backed gull resting on the water. The misty light magnifies things."

"Shall I get the glasses?"

"Not unless you want them. They're under the stuff we stowed away in the locker aft. If Charley has finished pumping, you might help him get out the spinnaker. We'll have the wind fair when the flood begins to run."

Marston and the fisher-lad vanished down the forecastle hatch, and Wyndham studied the distant object. He did not yet need the sail the others had gone for, but he was afraid of Charley's keen eyes. A buoy indicating a shoal was not far off and the sailing directions for the race stated that all marks of this kind must be kept on the port hand, but Wyndham knew the coast and imagined the tide was still ebbing in a neighboring river mouth. The main stream ran north and would carry the boats off their course, but near the shore another stream ran west across some wide shoals. If he could steer *Red Rose* into this current, it would help her on while her rivals, farther off the land, drifted back. When the others came up with the sail Wyndham wondered whether Marston would ask for the chart, but he did not. The object

they had seen had vanished, for although the wind was light the boat slowly forged ahead. The color of the smooth undulations indicated that the depth got less.

"Looks as if we were near West Hodden sand," Marston remarked. "They had a dispute at the committee about keeping us outside the bank. Makes a longer run, but some of the deep boats might have touched bottom if they'd tried to cross at low-water. Anyhow, it doesn't matter, so long as we all keep out."

Wyndham nodded and began to talk about something else.

"I hope we'll get fine weather, because I need bracing up. When you have not much money, business is a grind and I'm rather young to carry the responsibilities of the house. Things might have been easier, had Jim Wyndham not died two or three days after he fell ill."

Marston knew something about this. Wyndham Brothers was a small old-fashioned firm and Harry had recently taken control on his uncle's sudden death. James Wyndham was extravagant and Marston imagined he had left his affairs involved. Marston had no occupation and all the money he needed. Moreover, he was Harry's friend.

"Well," he said, "if you're short of capital, I think some could be got. Sound investments don't pay much, and now and then I feel I'd like a venture."

"You're a good sort, Bob. For all that, you had better leave business alone, because you would get robbed. Of course, if I saw a safe and profitable speculation, I might let you join, but just now I'm occupied trying to put things straight. Some are

badly tangled. I used to think I could carve my way to fortune if I got a chance, but so far it's been my luck to use broken tools."

Marston thought this was so. Harry was a good shot and racing skipper, but he had never had a first-class gun or boat. Still, he used the make-shifts well and sometimes beat better men.

"Yours is a pretty old house, isn't it?" Marston remarked.

"Wyndhams' was founded in the days of the slavers and privateers and has traded in West Africa and South America ever since. The house was famous, but its decline began when steamers knocked out the sailing ships. We stuck to the old vessels and own one or two small schooners yet, though they're only used for collecting cargo at beaches steamboats do not touch. Some of the documents I've recently studied tell a romantic tale. The Wyndhams were all adventurers and a number did not die in bed. One or two vanished abroad. As perhaps you know, my uncle Rupert did."

"I heard something about this," said Marston. "What happened?"

"Nobody knows. He left the West Indian factory; sailed off in a canoe and was not seen again. Books and money were in order and his health was pretty good. There was no explanation; he vanished, that's all. I saw him once in England and thought him a sober business man. One got no hint of wildness, but the house's records indicate a vein of romantic extravagance in my ancestors. For all that, my father was a quiet country parson and I have felt nothing of the kind."

Marston pondered. He knew Harry Wyndham rather well and had noted, in moments of excitement and strain, a curious recklessness that was perhaps not altogether normal. For example, there was the race when *Red Rose* and another yacht met close-hauled. *Red Rose* was on the port tack, and the rule was she must give way, but, until the last minute, Harry sat unmoved at the tiller. Marston remembered the piled-up foam about the plunging hulls as the yachts converged, the slanted pyramids of sail that looked as if they must shock, and the horrible tension he had felt. Then, when collision was imminent, Wyndham gave the other room and afterwards laughed.

"I was tempted to find out how it would feel if we rammed her," he confessed.

This, however, was some time since, and Marston did not dwell on the incident. His temperament was essentially normal.

"No sign of a breeze from the east yet," he said.

"All the same, it will come," Wyndham rejoined.

Marston looked about. The sun was getting low and it was nearly calm. Now and then the topsail flapped and the mainsail hung slack. Blocks rattled as the heavy boom jerked about. The swell was smooth and in color a curious shining green, as if the light were reflected through it from beneath. It looked as if they were crossing a big sand, but Marston did not sound. Harry knew the coast, and the sailing directions required them to keep outside the shoals.

In the distance a steamer's smoke trailed across the sky; one heard her engines beat with a monotonous rhythm. In front, the mist was melting and vague gray hills were faintly distinguishable. The yacht's

deck was damp, but for the rolling she hardly moved.

"We had better get some food," said Marston. "I'll light the stove."

He went to the cabin and when, after the rude meal, they lounged and smoked, the mist suddenly rolled away. Long hills, with woods among their folds, ran back on the port hand; in the distance, a big black headland cut against the sunset. The water astern was hazy and dotted by sails. It was now a glassy calm.

"We're nearer the coast than I reckoned, but the ebb has given us a big lift," Marston observed.

"The rest are a long way back, although I think they're moving."

"They've got the breeze and will bring it up," said Wyndham. "Hoist the spinnaker."

For the next few minutes Marston and the paid hand were occupied with the big triangular sail, which extended from the masthead to the end of a boom they thrust over the boat's side. A British yacht's spinnaker is not fitted with a gaff. At first the spinnaker hung slack, but presently lifted in gentle curves; then the water splashed against the planks and *Red Rose* began to move. She gathered speed. There was a humming noise astern, mast and rigging creaked, and foam leaped at the bows. It got cold, white ripples streaked the sea, and the wake ran back in a foaming wedge. The spinnaker swelled like a balloon and, with the tall mainsail on the other side, dwarfed the speeding hull.

The sun dipped, the dark sea stood up in ridges above *Red Rose's* rail, spray began to fly, and one heard the rush of wind and groaning of spars. The

boat yawed about and steering needed skill, since, if Wyndham let her swerve, spinnaker or mainsail would swing across and mast or boom would go. For all that, he risked a glance over his shoulder now and then. Some of the boats were coming up; they were bigger craft and gave *Red Rose* time by the handicap. She, however, gave time to others, and must save it in order to win.

Wyndham let go while the sea got rough, for the flood tide now ran against the freshening wind. While he swayed with the tiller she plunged and rolled about, lifting her bows out of boiling foam and sometimes burying them deep. Water flowed across her deck and presently began to splash beneath the cockpit floor, and Charley started the clanking pump. A full moon had risen and two big boats, with canvas that cut black against the silver light, were getting near.

"I think we'll save our time," Wyndham said.

Marston looked at the high topsail and bending spinnaker boom. He would have liked to haul the topsail down, but his comrade's voice had a strange gay note that he had heard before. Harry meant to carry on; he would drive the boat until something broke. Then Marston looked ahead. The big promontory was not far off and moonlight touched the towering crags. The sea was all white, for the current, setting strongly round the head, ran in angry combers against the wind.

"We are going to get wet in the tide-race," he said. "You might find slacker water if you edged her off a bit."

"And sail a longer course?" Wyndham rejoined.

"We give *Deva* four minutes and she's not far astern."

Marston acquiesced. After all, his business was to obey. "Oh, well," he said, "Charley and I had better get out on the booms."

He beckoned the paid hand and they crawled along the deck. *Red Rose* rolled savagely and main boom and spinnaker boom tossed their ends aloft. The spars must be kept down, lest they swing across, and Marston, clasping the varnished pole with arms and legs, crawled out as far as he dared. Sometimes he swung high above the combers that rushed past below; and sometimes swung down until his body was wet by the foam. He could hold on if Harry kept her straight, but if she swerved much the big sails would lurch across and he and Charley would hardly escape with broken bones. He looked aft. Wyndham's figure cut against the light; it was tense and his head was motionless, as if his glance was fixed. Marston knew he meant to bring *Red Rose* in on her time allowance or sail her under.

They drew round the head and reeled across a bay. A row of lights began to blink and two colored lanterns tossed. Marston saw the lights for a few moments when the spinnaker soared away from the boom. The race was nearly over, for the colored lights marked the flag-boat, anchored off the long iron pier. The committee had not given the yachts much room; perhaps they thought of their comfort and anchored the steamer near the beach so she would not roll about. Smart work would be needed to shorten sail before they struck the pier.

A shadow touched the spinnaker and Marston looked astern. A swaying pyramid of canvas shut out the moon and foam leaped about a plunging hull. *Ptarmigan* had crept up and would go past, but she was large and allowed *Red Rose* some time. Marston could not remember how much she allowed; all he could do was to hold on, for his arms ached and his head began to swim. A few minutes would finish the race, and he wondered dully what would happen then. There were, perhaps, two hundred yards between the flag-boat and the pier; they ought to haul down the spinnaker now, but Harry would carry on.

He saw *Ptarmigan's* topsail tilt downwards and dark figures run about her deck. Her spinnaker collapsed like a torn balloon, but *Red Rose* leaped on, pressed by straining sail. Then there was a flash, and the report of a gun rolled among the crags ahead. They drove into the smoke, speeding side by side with *Ptarmigan,* and the flash of another gun pierced the dark. Marston, crawling in-board, dropped into the cockpit as the flag-boat swept astern, and for the next few minutes he was desperately occupied.

The spinnaker went into the sea, the topsail thrashed half-way up the mast, and *Red Rose* listed until the water was deep on her lee deck. A white sea swept her forward as they hauled down the stay-sail; and then, coming round, she plunged head to wind, a few yards from the dark ironwork of the pier. Wyndham came to help and soon afterwards they brought her to a safe anchorage. While they stowed the sails a gig crossed the bows and somebody shouted: "Well done, *Red Rose!* You're first by three minutes on handicap time."

Wyndham put on his jacket and lighted a cigarette. 'Not bad for a boat I bought because she was outclassed. Sometimes I wonder what I could do if I had proper tools," he said. Then he laughed. "Anyhow, we had better start the pump."

CHAPTER II

MOONLIGHT AND GLAMOUR

ROCKETS leaped up from the old castle on the narrow flat between the woods and the strait. Colored fires burned behind the loopholes in the ruined walls, and an admiring crowd occupied the lawn that slanted to the water. The night was calm and when the band stopped the voices of a choir, singing old part-songs on the pier, carried well. There was a smell of drying seaweed, and the yachts' anchor-lights burned steadily in rows that wavered with the eddying tide. The last race was over and the townsfolk had given the crews a feast before the fleet dispersed.

Marston sat on a broken wall, talking to *Deva's* owner about the race along the coast. Elliot was a friend of Marston's. Chisholm, the commodore's young son, stood close by, smoking a cigarette.

"You beat us handsomely and Wyndham deserves the cup for his pluck in carrying on when we were forced to lower our topsail," Elliot admitted. "Still something was due to luck; you got the last of the stream along the shore when the tide running down the river carried the rest of us back."

"Wyndham has a talent for that kind of thing," said Marston. "Sometimes you feel he, so to speak, thinks like a fish. He doesn't need to calculate when the tide will turn and where he'll find slack water. He knows."

"Wyndham has a talent for getting what he wants," Chisholm interposed. "*Deva* ought to have beaten *Red Rose.*"

"Aren't you rather young to judge?" Marston asked, with a touch of dryness.

"Oh, well," said the lad, "I like a man who loses now and then. You can understand that kind of fellow."

Elliot frowned. He could take a beating; but he was curious and looked at Marston thoughtfully.

"I suppose you didn't see the Knoll buoy?"

"We did not," Marston replied. "There was something on the water in the haze, but it was too small for the buoy. Wyndham thought it a gull, a big black-back; his sight is pretty good."

"How did the thing bear?"

Marston hesitated, because he saw where the question led, but he was honest.

"Nearly ahead; a point or two to starboard. Anyhow, it vanished, although, as we didn't change our course, we must have passed the spot rather close," he replied, forgetting that he was below when the object vanished.

"Then it was a gull," Elliot agreed, but Chisholm was not satisfied.

"Elliot's a sportsman; I don't know if I am or not, because I was on board *Deva* and feel hurt we didn't get the cup. Wyndham's a smart skipper, but his luck's too good. One's inclined to doubt a man who always gets a prize. My notion is, it isn't altogether due to skill. Besides, I think the commodore would have liked Elliot to win the cup."

"You're not a tactful lad and perhaps you're not

in very good form just now," Elliot remarked. "We'll go along and hear the band."

They went off and Marston lighted his pipe. He was rather angry with young Chisholm, because he was persuaded Wyndham had not seen the buoy. Harry was not the man to win a race by a shabby trick; Marston trusted his friends.

In the meantime, Wyndham and Flora Chisholm occupied a bench in a quiet corner of the castle wall. Now and then a colored fire blazed up on the battlements and red reflections flickered about the crowded lawn, but there were dark intervals when they saw the water sparkle and the black hills across the strait. When the band stopped, one heard the soft splash of the tide, and the choir singing old Welsh airs. Flora was young and felt the glamour of the calm moonlight night.

Moreover, there was something strangely romantic about Wyndham. He was handsome and marked by a dashing recklessness that rather carried one away. Flora liked his pluck and bold seamanship. Her father was an old navy man and the yacht club commodore, and she had inherited his love for the sea. She had watched the finish of the race from the flagboat, and had seen *Red Rose* reel past, horribly pressed by sail. Fine skill and steady nerve were needed to bring the old boat in first.

Perhaps this was not important, but it was typical of Harry Wyndham; he ran risks and laughed. It was bracing to know him and flattering to feel that he was drawn to her. Yet Flora had some doubts; after all, she had not known Wyndham long and he had

drawbacks. He was poor, some of her friends distrusted him, and Chisholm had given hints — he approved Jim Elliot, and Flora thought Jim loved her. When Wyndham was away she hesitated and wondered whether she was rash; when he was near she thrilled and caution vanished. Presently she roused herself and began to talk.

Wyndham got a hint of strain and his heart beat. He imagined Flora was vaguely alarmed by his power to move her, but she did not go away. Although her fresh beauty had first attracted him, he soon saw she had qualities that strengthened her charm; she was proud, with a clean pride, honest, and plucky. All the same, he was poor; his people were known for their romantic extravagance and a touch of moral laxity. The business of which he had recently taken control languished and had not been very scrupulously carried on. Yet Wyndham was not daunted, and his love for the girl was sincere.

"Things will look different to-morrow when the boats have gone and the little town goes to sleep again," he said. "I feel doleful. The holiday's nearly over and soon after sunrise there'll be nothing left but a happy memory."

"Then you make an early start?"

"At half ebb: three or four o'clock. One wishes the night would last. Nights like this are not numerous."

"You ought to be satisfied. You won the cup."

"I meant to win. For one thing, you wished me luck."

Flora blushed and wondered whether he could see

her face. "After all, that was not much help," she said. "My wishing you luck wouldn't alter the wind and tide."

"It gave me an object and a stimulus. We are a curious lot and much depends on our mood. When one's braced enough, obstacles don't count. One runs risks and wins."

Flora was fastidious and got a faint jar. Yet she knew he was not a boaster; he did what he said. Besides, she was flattered.

"You are stopping for a few days, with the Commodore?" he resumed.

Flora said she was and he frowned. "I must go. I ought not to have taken the holiday, but the temptation was strong. Now I must make up for the lost time."

"Your new business keeps you occupied?"

"Yes; it claims all my thought, though now and then I deny the claim. The sea pulls and a boat's a fascinating toy; but a time comes when one must put one's toys away."

"For all that, you came to the regattas and won the cup."

Wyndham smiled and, for the moon was bright, Flora noted the reckless sparkle in his eyes.

"You know why I came and why I won the cup," he said. "Perhaps I'm vain, but I wanted you to see I could beat the others whose toys are all that occupy them. I have not their luck, and my object for coming drives me back to town. If I'm to realize my ambitions, I have got to work."

"Then you are ambitious?" Flora remarked and looked away.

"Very," he replied quietly. "I know my drawbacks and they must be removed. I have inherited the responsibilities of an embarrassed house. My job's to repair its credit, wipe out debts, and make Wyndhams' respected, as it was respected once. A big job, but the ambition behind it gives me driving force."

He paused and gave her a steady look. "Your father's friends are merchants and shipowners. You know I have much to build up and something to live down."

Flora was quiet for a moment or two. She had heard her friends talk about Wyndhams' and it was plain that they thought the new head of the house something of an adventurer. For all that, she was moved. She liked his frankness and his resolution. Looking about, she saw Marston and a girl she knew cross the lawn, and was tempted to join them. Had it not been for the glamour of the moonlight and sparkling sea, she might have gone.

"I wish you luck again!" she said quietly.

"Ah," he said, "that will carry me far! Farther than you think, perhaps, because I am going away."

Flora moved abruptly and he saw she was disturbed.

"Where are you going? Will you stop long?" she asked, and Wyndham knew his chance had come. Her friends might blame him, but he meant to use his power.

"To begin with, I'm going to West Africa, and then to South and Central America. We have an old schooner in the Guinea coast and I expect to sail her across. She can creep into lagoons and call at beaches the steamers do not touch. Somebody must

pull the house's vanishing trade together and I am the head."

"But it's a long ocean passage and an unhealthy coast," Flora remarked, with a note of strain in her voice. Altogether she tried to be calm.

"All the same, I must go, and go soon," Wyndham replied.

He stopped because he knew he had said enough, and Flora pondered. She would miss him much and his going forced her to front a crisis she would sooner have put off. She knew he loved her and he had a strange fascination; he stood for romance and adventure, but she was fastidiously honest and now and then he jarred. She felt vaguely that there was something about him she did not like.

In the meantime, Marston and his companion came by again. The girl was a friend of Flora's, but she passed without a glance and Flora knew she disapproved. Somehow she wished her lover was like Bob Marston. Bob had no fascination; indeed, he was rather dull, but he was frank and honest and one trusted him. She knew she ought to join him and Mabel; there was danger in stopping, but she did not go. Harry would sail at daybreak and she would be lonely afterwards.

Marston and the girl went on, the music stopped, and Flora heard the drowsy splash of the tide. The moonlight sparkled on the strait and she felt a strange longing to be rash. One missed much unless one had pluck. Then Wyndham put his hand on her arm and gave her a long ardent look.

"I am going away," he said. "I must go. For

your sake, I must try to mend my damaged inheritance. Will you marry me when I come back?"

Flora hesitated until he put his arm round her and her doubts vanished. Romance conquered and passion swept her away. She yielded when he drew her to him, and gave back his kiss. Then he let her go as people came towards them and they crossed the lawn.

"My dear!" he said triumphantly. "I can conquer all my difficulties now and make your friends approve. You have given me a power I never had; I feel I can't be stopped."

His eyes were very bright and he lifted his head. He looked unconquerable and his confidence was flattering. Flora's doubts had gone. He was her acknowledged lover and she was very staunch.

"I must see your father when he gets back to town," Wyndham said presently. "The committee will keep him until too late to-night."

"Yes," said Flora with faint misgivings, "you must see him soon."

Wyndham's eyes twinkled. "It's possible he will get a jolt. I'll own I was half afraid; but I fear nothing now."

"He loves me," Flora answered with a quiet look, and Wyndham said nothing, but pressed her arm.

They left the castle grounds for the quiet beach, and in the meantime Mabel Hilliard and Marston leaned against the rails on the pier. For a time the girl watched the water foam among the pillars and then looked up.

"Why didn't you speak to Wyndham?" she asked.

Marston smiled. "I think the reason was plain; Harry didn't want us. Why didn't you speak to Flora?"

Mabel made a sign of impatience. "I wanted to, but this would have been different. Flora wouldn't have suspected you were meddling."

"I see," said Marston. "I'm known to be dull; but I'm not so dull that I miss your meaning. Well, you know Harry Wyndham's my friend."

They were lovers who used no reserve, and Mabel did not hesitate.

"Flora's my friend," she said. "Do you always trust Wyndham?"

"If I didn't trust him, he wouldn't be my friend."

"In some ways, you're very nice, Bob. But I'm afraid. Flora's attracted by Wyndham. I wish she were not."

"Why? Don't you like Harry?"

"It's rather that I love Flora. She's sincere and proud. She's fastidious; I think I mean she's scrupulously honorable."

"Then you imply that Harry is not?" Marston asked, with a touch of sternness.

"No, I don't altogether imply this; but I feel he is not the man for Flora."

"Well," said Marston quietly, "I have known Harry long. He's clever and generous; he has pluck and when strain comes is his best. I know what some folks think about him, and Harry knows his handicap. The Wyndhams were rather a wild lot, the family business was drifting on the rocks, and the character of its recent head was not good. All this is a load for

Harry, but he'll run straight, and I feel my job is to help him out."

Mabel was not much comforted, but she gave him a smile.

"If he is going to marry Flora, I want you to help him," she replied.

They went off and some time afterwards Wyndham came along the pier. The fireworks were over and the crowd had gone, but a group of men stood about some steps that led to a narrow stage where the yachts' boats were moored. The tide ran fast, foaming against the iron pillars, but the promenade above threw a dark shadow on the water. Wyndham stopped at the steps and tried to see if *Red Rose's* dinghy was tied among the rest. It was too dark; all he could distinguish was a row of boats that swung about. Then young Chisholm pushed past.

"The weed on the steps is slippery and I'm not going down. A yachtsman jumps into a punt," he said.

A yacht's punt is small and generally unstable, and to jump on board needs skill. Marston came up and seized Chisholm's shoulder.

"Don't be a fool, Jack!" he said. "It's six or seven feet. If you don't capsize her, you'll go through the bottom."

"Think I can't jump six feet?" the lad exclaimed, and Wyndham imagined he had drunk some wine at the committee supper. "Anyhow, I'll try."

He shook off Marston's hand and leaped. His dark figure vanished and there was a splash below. Marston and the others climbed down the steps, but

Wyndham jumped. He went under water and knew the risk he ran when he came up; he had known when he made the plunge. The tide swept him past the boats and broke angrily among the ironwork. One might get entangled and pulled down, and if a punt came to help, she would probably capsize when the current drove her against a brace.

For a moment or two he drifted, and then saw something dark wash about in a wedge of foam. It was Chisholm, clinging to an iron and trying to keep his head above water.

"Let go! I'll pick you up on the other side," shouted Wyndham, and the current swept them under a beam.

Then he grasped the lad's shoulder and steered him between two pillars. The splash of oars indicated that a boat was pulling round the pier. Wyndham's arm struck a cross-bar and next moment something caught his leg, but he went clear and, dragging Chisholm with him, drifted into the moonlight. He felt safe now; all they need do was to wait until the boat arrived. They were a hundred yards from the pier when she came up and Marston leaned over the bow.

"Let me have him," he said. "Back her and sit steady, Tom."

Wyndham knew he could trust Bob and let Chisholm go. Marston dragged him on board and then balanced the boat while Wyndham lifted himself over the stern. Chisholm did not seem much the worse, for he began to squeeze the water from his clothes and laughed.

"Trouble was, the punt I jumped for wasn't there," he said. "Imagine I owe you something, Wyndham.

The other fellows couldn't have got me while I stuck to the brace, and if I'd let go, I'd have gone under the irons."

"That's all right!" Wyndham remarked. "You'll look before you jump another time."

They put Chisholm on board a steam yacht and when they reached *Red Rose* Marston said, "It was lucky for Jack you were about. We couldn't have got in between the braces with the punt."

"It was a stroke of luck for both of us," Wyndham replied with a laugh.

CHAPTER III

CHISHOLM'S PERSUASION

COMMODORE CHISHOLM sat in his smoking-room and knitted his brows while Wyndham talked. The room was small and plainly furnished and the books on the shelves were all about the sea; narratives of old explorers' voyages, works on naval tactics, and yacht registers. Wyndham spoke fast and with marked eagerness, and when he was moved he had a strange power of persuasion, but now and then Chisholm frowned. Although he knew he must give way, he hesitated. There was something romantic and, so to speak, exotic, about Wyndham, and Chisholm liked sober English calm.

For all that, he loved his daughter, whom he had long indulged, and knew her mind. He had only two children, Jack and Flora, and his wife was dead. Chisholm had loved her well and married rather late. It was for her sake and because his pay was small he left the navy and took a post in the service of a public navigation board. Although he held his navy rank he was generally given his yachting title, the "Commodore." He was scrupulously just, frank, and rather slow; a man at whom his friends sometimes smiled but always trusted. Now he frankly wished his daughter had chosen another lover. It was not that he disliked the fellow; he knew his family history

and what business men thought about Wyndham Brothers. Still, it looked as if Flora was satisfied.

"You ask me rather a hard thing," he remarked when Wyndham stopped. "However, if Flora agrees, I suppose I cannot refuse. It's obvious I owe you much."

"You mean my pulling Jack out of the water? I don't want to urge this. It was really nothing, and the lad swims well."

"There is some risk in trying to swim through a net of iron rods when a four-knot current runs through the holes; as I expect you knew when you plunged. Besides, it's plain Jack was excited and a little off his balance. The others went for a punt; you saw the real danger and steered him through."

Wyndham imagined Chisholm was struggling with his prejudices and trying to be just. He had a generous vein and the Commodore's honesty moved him.

"My strongest argument is that I love Flora," he declared.

"It counts for much," said Chisholm, who felt his sincerity. "Still, there are other matters one must talk about."

"That is so, sir," Wyndham agreed. "Well, I know I'm asking much and I'm handicapped. I'm poor; when I took the family business I took a load of debt and some distrust. We're not a conventional lot; we have long been reckless and adventurous."

He stopped for a moment, and then, while Chisholm approved his frankness, went on: "All the same, I'm young; the house's fortunes can be mended and its credit made good, and I have an object for putting my heart into the job. It will be something of a strug-

gle, sir, but I've got a fighting chance, and with Flora's help I feel I'm going to win."

"How do you propose to mend the house's fortunes?" Chisholm asked.

"For a start, I've planned to visit our factories abroad, study our trade on the spot, and turn out incompetent agents. I'll begin in West Africa and then cross to the Caribbean. I expect to use our trading schooner."

Chisholm looked up, rather quickly, and Wyndham saw his interest was roused. When one talked about boats the Commodore was keen, and Wyndham's voyage was, so to speak, safe ground.

"It's a long run," Chisholm remarked.

"The slavers' road, sir," said Wyndham, who meant to lead him on. "A slow beat against the Guinea current until one clears the windward ports and works up to the Pambier; and then a fast reach across open water in the North-East Trades. The early adventurers used smaller boats than mine."

"They pushed off from the Azores and Canaries, north of your track, and carried the North-Easter farther across. If you get to leeward, you'll strike the equatorial calms. But what about your boat?"

"She's an old ninety-ton yacht, the *Columbine,* and was rather famous once."

"*Columbine?*" said Chisholm, who took down a yacht register. "Here she is! Good builders, men who stuck to oak and teak. But she's thirty years old."

Wyndham smiled. The Commodore was getting keen; he was as enthusiastic as a boy when he talked about the sea.

"I understand she's pretty sound and I must use the tools I've got. Her draught is light. We can cross river bars and get into shallow lagoons. Our factories stand by the mangrove creeks the slavers haunted. Wyndhams' were slavers long since."

"An old house!" said Chisholm. "Your folks were pioneers. There's something in a long record; habits and characteristics go with the blood of an old stock."

"Sometimes that has drawbacks, sir," Wyndham remarked.

Chisholm did not follow him and Wyndham saw he was musing about the romance of the sea.

"But what about your crew?" the Commodore asked.

"I expect to keep the Liberian Krooboys now on board. A half-tamed, reckless lot, but every Krooboy's a sailor."

"I know; fine stuff, but needs management," Chisholm agreed. "I was on patrol along the Guinea coast — a long time since. Blazing sun, roaring bars, steaming mangrove swamps, and sickness. For all that, there's a fascination you get nowhere else, unless it's on the Caribbean and coast of Brazil. The world's alike on the lines of latitude and man's morals follow the parallels." He paused with a dreamy look and then resumed: "I'm getting old and have my duty; but if I could, I'd go with you."

For a time they talked about the voyage, and then, with a half-embarrassed smile, Chisholm pulled himself up. "I'm forgetting. There are things I ought to ask ——"

Wyndham told him how much money he had, and

when Chisholm looked thoughtful, went on: "I don't expect your consent to our marrying yet. It's not long since I took control of the business and much depends on the arrangements I hope to make at our factories. Things will look better when I come back."

"It's possible. But you do not know."

"I really do know, sir," Wyndham declared. "You can make my ability to put things straight a stipulation, if you like. I'm willing to be tested. I feel I can't fail."

Chisholm studied him for a moment or two. Wyndham's eyes sparkled; he looked strangely forceful and resolute, and Chisholm thought he understood why Flora had been carried away. The fellow was handsome and romantic. Besides, he was a fine sailor, and Chisholm knew his pluck.

"Very well," he said. "We'll let it go like that. The wedding must wait until you come back, but I wish you luck."

Wyndham thanked him and when he went off Chisholm pondered. Perhaps he had agreed rather weakly; he had meant to be firmer, but Wyndham had led him to talk about his voyage. Anyhow, the fellow had charm. It was hard to refuse him and Chisholm had seen he was sincere. By and by he got up and lighted his pipe. The thing was done with and he had given his consent. Somehow he had been persuaded and after all if Flora was satisfied ——

Chisholm had not stipulated that nobody should be told and Flora's friends had much to talk about. Mabel Hilliard was disturbed, and when Marston came to her mother's house one evening took him to the garden.

"Bob," she said, "I suppose you know Wyndham is going to marry Flora?"

"I do know," said Marston. "In fact, I approve. Flora is nearly the nicest girl I've met. However, I imagine you're not satisfied."

"I am not. Flora has been my friend since we were children. I am very fond of her and think she is quite the nicest girl you have met."

"Bar one!" Marston interposed.

Mabel smiled. "Oh, well, I expect your judgment's biased, Bob. But let me go on, although it's rather awkward ground. Wyndham has charm, he's picturesque; something of the gentleman-adventurer type. I think that's what I mean."

"But you don't like the type? I thought it appealed to a girl's imagination. Anyhow, although we're getting conventionalized, there are gentlemen-adventurers and we have jobs for them yet."

"I am not romantic," Mabel replied, with a twinkling glance. "I like sober men, even if they're sometimes slow; men who keep a promise but don't protest much. One doesn't want to be dazzled. A steady light is enough."

Marston was silent for a moment or two. Mabel's trust moved him and he was half embarrassed. Then he said: "There's a remark of yours I can't let go. No ground you think you ought to venture on is awkward to us. Very well. You don't approve Harry's marrying Flora, but what line d'you want me to take? I can't give him up and you're not going to give up your friend. It wouldn't be like you."

"I want you to stick to him closer than before. Flora and he may need us both. One feels that

Wyndham's unstable, and you make good ballast, Bob."

"Well, I suppose I'm heavy enough and you have given me an easy job. It's curious, but not long since I told Harry I'd see him out if he wanted help and yesterday he hinted he'd like a partner for his voyage South. In a way, of course, I don't want to go."

Mabel hid her disturbance and mused. She was modern and sometimes frivolous, but she was very staunch and loved two people well. She did not want Bob to go and yet she thought he ought. Mabel had an instinctive distrust for Wyndham, although she liked him. She felt that with his temperament he would run risks in the South and he must be protected, for Flora's sake. Flora had promised to marry Wyndham and Mabel knew she would keep her word. Well, sober, honest Bob, who was really cleverer than people thought, was the man to take care of him.

"If Wyndham urges it, I must let you go," she said.

Marston gave her a steady glance, and nodded.

"I understand. Of course, I think your notion's ridiculous. Harry doesn't need a fellow like me, but you mean well. Although, in one way, I'd frankly like the trip, in another I'd much sooner stay."

"I know," said Mabel. "You're a dear, Bob."

Then she got up, smiling, and advanced to meet Chisholm and Flora, who came up the garden path.

Wyndham urged Marston to go with him, and a week or two afterwards Flora and Mabel stood on the deck of a paddle tug crossing a busy river mouth. The day was dull and a haze of smoke from two towns

hung about the long rows of warehouses and massive river walls. Out in the stream, a small steamer with a black funnel and a row of white deckhouses moved seawards with the tide. The figures grouped along her rail got indistinct, but Flora's eyes were fixed upon two that stood away from the rest, until they faded. Then the African boat vanished behind the towering hull of an anchored liner.

Flora turned and lowered her veil, for her eyes were wet. Chisholm was on board the tug, but he was some distance off. Mabel was near, and her look was strained.

"In a way, it's only a long yachting trip," the latter remarked.

"No," said Flora; "we both know it is not. It's a rash adventure; Harry is going South, as his people all have gone, and some did not come back."

"Of course he'll come back! Travel's safe and easy now. They'll have no adventures, except perhaps, at sea."

"I'm not afraid of the sea," Flora said in a quiet voice. "It's the tropic coast; the big muddy rivers that get lost in the forest, and the dark lagoons among the mangrove swamps. The country's insidious; its influence is strong."

Mabel forced a smile. She thought Flora was not disturbed about the physical dangers, such as fever and shipwreck. It looked as if she knew her lover.

"Anyhow, Bob is going with Harry, and Bob is not romantic," she remarked. "In fact, he's the steadiest, most matter-of-fact man I know. Nothing excites Bob much. It's very hard to carry him away."

Flora gave her a grateful look. Since she must not criticize Harry, they could not be altogether frank, but she saw Mabel understood. The men they loved had very different temperaments, and Bob would be a useful counterbalance. He was sober and practical: one could trust him. It was hard to own that, in a sense, she could not trust Harry. He was rash, and Flora did not like the stories about the Wyndhams who had not come back. However, Bob was going, and she imagined she owed Mabel much.

"I like Bob," she said. "I expect it cost you something to send him with Harry."

"He wanted to go."

Flora put her hand in the other's arm. "But you might have stopped him."

"He's Harry's friend," said Mabel. "I am yours. After all, that counts for something, but we won't talk about it now. Your promising to marry Harry has drawn us closer. It's an extra tie, because all Bob's friends are mine."

The tug's whistle shrieked as she swung across the tide to the landing stage and Flora looked down the river. In the distance, where granite walls and warehouses got small and indistinct, the African boat melted into the smoke and mist. Flora felt strangely forlorn and half afraid.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN WHO VANISHED

MOONLIGHT glittered on the West African river and it was very hot; the air was heavy, humid, and tainted by miasmatic vapors. Inside the lonely factory, moisture dripped from the beams and the big bare room that opened on the veranda smelt of mildew. Across the river, tangled mangroves loomed through drifting mist that hid the banks of mud about their long, arched roots. Wyndham's schooner, *Columbine,* rode in midstream, her tall masts and the graceful sweep of her rail cutting black against the silver light. Somebody on board was singing a Kroo paddling song with a strange monotonous air. In the distance one heard the rumble of heavy surf.

The factory was old and ruinous and the agent's hair was going white. He sat opposite Wyndham, at the end of a table about which documents were scattered; a cocktail jug and some glasses occupied the middle. Ellams was haggard and his skin was a jaundiced yellow. Marston lounged in a deck chair, with the perspiration running down his face, and smoked a cigarette.

"I think I have told you all you want to know, and I'm willing to give up my post," Ellams remarked. "Indeed, I'm beginning to feel I'm too old for the job. Few white men have lived as long in the fever

swamps; as a rule an agent's run was very short when I first came out. We didn't bother about mosquitoes then. The tropical-diseases people hadn't discovered the mischievous habits of *anopheles.*"

"You were here with my uncle, I think?" said Wyndham.

"I was with him for a year or two," Ellams answered, in a reminiscent tone. "A strange man, in some ways! I expect it's long since you saw him?"

"He came to England when I was a boy."

Ellams smiled. "When I saw you cross the compound, I thought Rupert Wyndham had come back. Wait a moment; I have his portrait."

He brought a faded and mildewed photograph. Wyndham studied it, without speaking, and then gave it to Marston, who made a little gesture of surprise. He imagined Rupert Wyndham was about his comrade's age when the portrait was taken, and the likeness was strange. There was in both faces a hint of recklessness and unrest, although the hint was plainer in the portrait. It indicated that Rupert would venture much and take paths sober men did not tread. Somehow it disturbed Marston.

"I suppose you know he vanished in the West Indies?" Wyndham remarked.

"Yes," said Ellams quietly. "I half expected something like this ——"

"Ah!" said Wyndham. "Well, we've done with business for to-night. Tell me about my uncle."

Ellams drained his glass and Marston noted that his hand shook. The man had obviously suffered much from ague and fever.

"Rupert Wyndham was here before me," Ellams

began. "Procter was agent when he arrived and Procter had got some native habits. That's a risk men who indulge their curiosity run in Africa. There's danger of forgetting one is white. I imagine it was unlucky Rupert began with Procter; his was a strange, adventurous temperament ——"

"I'm told I have some of Rupert's characteristics," Wyndham remarked. "But go on."

"When your uncle came out, there was no rule but the negro headman's. British authority stopped a few miles from the outpost stockade, and traders made their own laws; they lived and drank hard. In some ways, things are not very different yet. We kill mosquitoes and dig drains, but Africa doesn't change.

"Well, Procter had gone the way some white men go, and when he died your uncle got a jar. Rupert had only known England and he was young, but I don't mean he was daunted. Rather he lost his balance and started on a line he ought to have left alone. Sometimes he talked about the thing. I suspect he knew the Leopards killed Procter."

"The *Leopards?*" Marston interrupted.

"The Ghost Leopards, a secret society. In this country, there are a number, run by the Ju-Ju priests. They're supposed to use magic, but they're a power in native politics and have given the British government trouble. Perhaps the Leopards are the strongest. The bushmen believe they can take the form of the animals, and when they like make themselves invisible. Anyhow, the headman they don't approve seldom rules very long ——"

Ellams paused for a few moments and resumed:

"It was a hot night when Rupert Wyndham thought he heard Procter call. He said his voice was choked and faint. He got up; he occupied the room yonder—" Ellams indicated a door opposite and went on: "There was no light, but the moon shone through the window behind us. Rupert had only been awake a few moments and heard nothing but the faint cry. He ran out in his pyjamas and found Procter on the floor. Procter's body was warm, but when Wyndham tried to lift him he saw he was dead. He lay across the cracked board where Mr. Marston sits."

Marston half-consciously pushed back his chair. "But what indicated the Leopards?"

"There were strange marks on Procter's throat. Wyndham thought they looked like the marks of claws."

Marston pondered while Ellams filled his glass. He pictured the huddled figure in pyjamas lying across the rotten boards, and the marks on the throat. As a rule his nerve was good, but the picture daunted him and he did not like his comrade's strange, fixed look. In a sense, the story was ridiculous; that is, it would have looked ridiculous in England, but Africa was different. Theatrical tragedy was not strange there, and he did not think Ellams had exaggerated much.

"Well," said the latter, "in the morning Wyndham found the factory boys had gone. He was alone with Procter and could get no help; besides, he had a dose of fever and when malaria grips you, your imagination works. He said perhaps the worst was the quietness and the buzzing of the flies. He dug a grave, but could not get Procter down the steps; fever makes one

very limp, you know. Well, he sat there all day, keeping the flies off Procter, and in the evening a Millers' launch came up stream."

"A ghastly day!" said Marston, but Wyndham signed to Ellams.

"You haven't told it all. Go on."

"I'm an old servant and you're the head of the house," Ellams replied meaningly. "Well, I think that day left a mark on Rupert Wyndham. When I arrived he was moody and often brooded, but it looked as if he had a talent for managing the bushmen. They seemed to understand him and the business was growing fast. He began to go up river, although I imagine no other trader had reached the native market then. It was good for business; our oil was first quality and we got stuff, skins and sometimes ivory, Millers' and the Association couldn't buy. Besides, there were bits of pottery, brass, and silver work, the Fulah brought across the desert. Wyndham said the patterns were Sarascenic and the stuff was hundreds of years old. The house knew where to sell the goods at home. Once or twice we got Aggri beads."

"I didn't know about that," Wyndham remarked and turned to Marston. "In Africa, Aggri beads are worth almost any price you like to ask. We can't imitate them and don't know how they are made. It's very rare for a negro headman to let an Aggri go."

Ellams made a sign of agreement, and gave Wyndham an apologetic glance. "You see what this implies?"

"I think I see. My uncle was getting native habits; he was getting an influence ——"

"He stopped away from the factory longer. Men

with tattoo marks I didn't know came down and talked to him, and sometimes brought no trade. I thought he ran risks and warned him, but he laughed. It went on, and we were getting rich when the change began. Our trade did not fall off much, but one felt a difference ——"

Ellams paused, and looked thoughtful when he resumed: "I can't altogether make things plain; there was a feeling of insecurity, and Wyndham's moodiness got worse. He did not go away so much, and locked his room door at night. I think he did not sleep and took some draught; not drugs white men use, but stuff the negroes make. When he did sleep, he was strangely hard to rouse. He was cool and as nearly fearless as any man I knew, but he began to look haggard and start at unexpected sounds. One morning I could not wake him and went round to the veranda window. Wyndham was fast asleep and a gun lay across his bed. He was a good shot with a pistol, but this was a heavy duck-gun that threw an ounce and a quarter of shot. Well, I was getting nervy, and the factory boys would not stop — it looked as if they knew something was wrong. I began to wonder how long Wyndham could keep it up."

The others were quiet when Ellams reached for the cocktail jug and finding it empty filled his pipe. Marston had spent some weeks on the African coast and sympathized with the agent. When one had seen the country and breathed the foul miasma that saps the white man's strength, one could understand the strain Ellams talked about. It was a daunting country and the gloom of its steamy forests was the shadow of death.

"After all," said Ellams, "there was no theatrical climax. One day a launch brought us a cablegram. Wyndham was wanted at home, the ebb tide was running and a mailboat was due to call at Takana lagoon. In an hour *Columbine* dropped down stream and my notion is it was a relief to Wyndham the cablegram arrived. If it had not arrived, he would have stayed. He was that kind of man."

"Had you trouble afterwards?" Marston asked.

"I had not. It was as if a shadow had melted. The strain had gone."

"Then it looks as if my uncle, alone, were threatened," Wyndham remarked.

Ellams nodded. "Yes. I think it was, so to speak, a personal thing. For all that, our trade got slack and has not since touched the mark it reached in your uncle's time. Well, I think that's all, and perhaps I have talked too much."

"If you'll mix another cocktail, we'll go to bed," Wyndham replied and when, a few minutes afterwards, he went to his room stopped at the door.

"This is where Rupert Wyndham slept with the gun beside him, I suppose?" he said. "I wonder what he dreamed about!"

For some time Marston did not sleep. As a rule, he did not indulge his imagination, but he had been disturbed by the agent's tale and there were strange noises. Some he thought were made by cracking boards and falling damp; others puzzled him and he found them daunting in the dark. They were like footsteps, as if somebody stole about the rooms. Marston had had enough of Africa and yet he owned the country had a mysterious charm. White men

stayed, knowing the risk they ran and without much hope of money reward, until they died of fever or their minds got deranged. The latter happened now and then. In order to keep sane, one must concentrate on one's business and refuse to speculate about the secret life of the bush. After all, there was much to speculate about ——

Marston pulled himself up. He was a sober white man and had nothing to do with the negro's fantastic superstitions. Magic and witchcraft were ridiculous, but in a country where they were a ruling force it was not easy to laugh. He thought Rupert Wyndham had made rash experiments and had dared too much, and although this was perhaps not important, Harry had his uncle's temperament. The trouble was there. Still they would leave the river soon and it would be a relief to go to sea. The sea was clean and bracing.

Three or four days afterwards *Columbine* dropped down stream on the ebb. A big naked Krooboy held the wheel, another in the fore-channels swung the lead and called the depth in a musical voice. The white factory got indistinct and melted into the swamps, the puffs of wind were fresher, and Marston was conscious of a keen satisfaction as the dreary mangroves slipped astern and yellow sand and lines of foam came into view ahead.

Wyndham, smoking a cigarette, leaned against the rail. He wore white duck without a crease and a big pale-gray hat. Marston thought he looked very English, with his keen blue eyes, light hair, and red skin, but his gaze was contemplative.

"You're not sorry to get away?" he presently re-

marked. "I wonder whether Rupert Wyndham was."

"I wonder why he stayed," said Marston. "Unless, of course, he was earning money."

"A plausible explanation, but I'm not sure it's good," Wyndham replied with a smile. "The head of our house was often extravagant but never, I think, a miser. We're not a greedy lot."

"You were traders; the object of trading is to get rich."

"I doubt if this was my uncle's, or some of my other ancestors' object, I think they valued money for what it would buy. Anyhow, they seldom kept it long."

"Since most of us value money for what it will buy, I don't understand," Marston rejoined.

"You bought a country house, a sober sportsman's life, and the liking of honest friends. Well, your investments were sound, but there are men of other temperaments they mightn't satisfy. I don't think they would have satisfied Rupert Wyndham."

"Then what did he expect to get in the swamps?"

"I don't know," said Wyndham, with a curious smile. "Perhaps strange experiences; perhaps knowledge and power. I imagine he knew he must buy them and was willing to pay."

"Power over tattooed bushmen!" Marston exclaimed. "What could they teach him?"

"Things we have begun to experiment with and their Ju-Ju men knew long since. The white man who knows the meaning of their tattoo marks has gone some distance; they're not all tribal signs. However, I don't know what Rupert Wyndham learned and

it looks as if I shall not find out. Our object's very matter of fact; to earn as much money as possible."

"That is so. I mean to stick to it," said Marston firmly.

Wyndham laughed. "I expect you mean to see I take your line! Well, it's a good line. But we're getting near the bar. Suppose you fetch the chart?"

CHAPTER V

THE TORNADO

THE night was hot and nearly calm, and Marston, sitting on the cabin skylight, languidly looked about. A Krooboy held the wheel, and his dark figure cut against the phosphorescent sea. *Columbine's* bulwarks were low and when she rolled the long, smooth swell ran level with their top. A dim glow came from the compass binnacle, but the schooner was close-hauled and the Kroo steered by the faint strain on the helm. The wind was light and baffling and *Columbine* beat against it as she worked along the coast.

She carried all her canvas and her high gaff-topsail swung rhythmically across the sky, shutting out the stars. Her dark mainsail looked very big and every now and then shook down a shower of dew as its slack curves swelled. A small moon touched the tops of the undulations with silver light, and when the bows went down the foam that leaped about the planks glimmered with green and gold. Booms and blocks rattled and timbers groaned.

Marston could not see the land, which was hidden by the sour, hot mist that at sunset rolls off the African coast. He did not want to see it; he hoped he had done with Africa, but he doubted. *Columbine* was on the track the keels of the old slavers plowed, and he felt that the shadow of the dark country might

follow him across the sea. Long since, Africa had peopled South America and the West Indies; Wyndham's ancestors had helped in that. One found mangrove swamps, fever, and negro superstition on the Caribbean coast, and it was significant that Rupert Wyndham had vanished there. The trouble was Harry had inherited something of his uncle's temperament. All the same, Marston had undertaken to stand by him and meant to do so.

The breeze got lighter, the wet canvas flapped, and *Columbine* hardly made steerage way. She rolled until her bulwarks touched the water and threw off fiery foam. One could not stand on her slanted deck, and blocks and spars made a hideous din. In the distance, the roar of surf rose and fell with a measured beat. Somewhere in the mist the big combers crashed upon a hammered beach. It did not matter if there was wind or not; the white band of surf had fringed the coast since the world was young.

Marston found his watch dreary. There was nothing to do; nothing, that he could see, threatened, and the scattered light clouds hardly moved across the sky. He was filling his pipe when he heard a step and saw Wyndham by the wheel. He knew him by his white duck; the negro crew did not wear much clothes.

"Hallo!" he said. "My watch is not up."

"I was awake," Wyndham replied. "Felt I ought to get on deck. The glass is falling."

"Did you feel you ought to come *after* you noted this?"

"Before," said Wyndham, dryly. "I didn't know the glass had dropped until I got a light, but it looks as if I might have stayed below. However, since I

have turned out, we'll haul down the main-topsail."

He gave an order and two Krooboys got to work. There was no obvious reason for lowering the sail, but when Wyndham ordered the negroes obeyed. Although they grinned with frank good-humor when Marston talked to them, he knew he did not share Wyndham's authority. Yet Harry was not harsh.

When the sail was lowered Wyndham looked about. Some of the scattered clouds had rolled together and the sky was black over the land. One could scarcely feel the light wind, but the surf had got louder. Its roar came out of the dark as if heavy trains were running along the coast.

"It looks ridiculous, particularly since I'd like to edge her farther off the beach, but I think we'll stow the mainsail and fore-staysail," Wyndham remarked.

Marston agreed. Although he could see no grounds for shortening sail, he trusted Wyndham's judgment, and the Krooboys got to work again. The ropes, however, were stiff and swollen with the dew, and the mainsail came down slowly. The heavy folds of canvas caught between the topping-lifts; the gaff-jaws jambed on the mast. Wyndham sent a man aloft to sit upon and ride down the spar, but this did not help much, and the boom along the foot of the sail lurched with violent jerks. Blocks banged and loose ropes whipped across the deck. The sweat ran down Marston's face; he wanted to finish the job. For one thing, *Columbine* was unmanageable while the half-lowered canvas flapped about.

Stopping a moment for breath, he glanced over the rail. The long swell sparkled with small points of light that coalesced in sheets of green flame when

the undulations broke against the schooner's side. The deck was spangled with luminous patches by the splashes and the wake that trailed astern was bright. *Columbine* stole through the water although the wind had nearly gone. It was not worth while to bring her head-to when they shortened sail.

Then the helmsman shouted and Marston felt one side of his face and body cool. The loose canvas flapped noisily. Its folds shook out and swelled, and Marston seized a rope. His skin prickled; he felt a strange tension and a feverish desire to drag down the sticking gaff. A few moments afterwards, something flickered behind the sail and a peal of thunder drowned the noise on board. When it died away, rolling hull, slanted masts, and the figures of the men stood out, wonderfully sharp, against a dazzling blaze that vanished and left bewildering dark. The next peal of thunder deafened Marston, who thought Wyndham shouted but heard no words. This did not matter, because he knew they must secure the sail before the tornado broke, and he pulled at the downhaul. He could not hear the wind for the thunder, but it had begun to blow.

The sail swelled between the confining ropes, there was a noise on one side of the yacht, water foamed along the planks, and she began to swing. It looked as if the steersman were putting up the helm. The peak of the gaff was nearly down; with another good pull they could seize it and lash it to the boom. Then a dazzling flash touched the deck. Marston saw Wyndham run aft and push the Kroo from the wheel, but this was the last he saw clearly for sometime. He imagined the fellow had meant to run the yacht off

before the squall; one could ease the strain of a sudden blast like that, but if the squall lasted, they could not shorten sail while she was before the wind. Now she was coming round. Wyndham had put the helm down. It looked as if he were too late.

The tornado broke upon her side and she went over until her lee rail was in the sea. There was a noise like a thunder-clap forward as a sail blew away; Marston thought it was the jib. He could see nothing. It had got impenetrably dark, but he had a vague notion that water rushed along the deck and the mainsail had broken loose and blown out between the ropes. Unless they could master it, the mast would go. He heard another report forward and thought somebody had loosed the staysail halyards and the sail had blown to rags. Although his eyes were useless, he knew what was going on.

But they must secure the main gaff, and clutching at the boom above his head, he swung himself up and worked along to its outer end, which stretched over the stern. A footrope ran below the spar; one could balance oneself by its help and he vaguely distinguished somebody close by. It was, no doubt, Wyndham, because his clothes looked white. There was no use in shouting. The uproar drowned one's voice; besides, their job was plain. They must get a rope round the end of the gaff and lash it fast.

Marston's waist was on the boom; his feet stuck out behind him, braced against the rope. In front there was a dark gulf. This was, no doubt, the hollow of the sail, and the indistinct slanting line above was the gaff. He threw a rope across the latter, but the end did not drop, so that he could seize it under the sail;

the wind blew it out, straight and tight. He tried again, farther aft, jostling against the figure that looked faintly white, and leaning down across the boom, caught the end of the rope. The other man helped him and when they had got a loop round the end of the gaff he stopped for breath. He was shaky after the effort, his heart thumped painfully, and his chest rose and fell. He imagined other men were on the boom, but he and his companion were all that mattered. They must lash the peak down before the sail blew out again. When this was done, the others could master the distended folds.

The wet rope tore his hands; he felt them get slippery with blood, but he held on and the man beside him helped. Marston knew he was not a Kroo. The Kroos were bold sailors, but their resolution had a limit. When a job looked hopeless they gave up; the man beside Marston was another type. While there was breath in his body he would stick to his task. The sail must be conquered.

Lightning played about them and Marston's eyes were dazzled by the changes from intolerable glare to dark. He trusted to the feel of things and his seaman's knowledge of what was happening. He did not think, but worked half-consciously. They made the gaff fast, and then something broke and the heavy boom swung out over the sea. The jerk threw Marston's feet from the rope and his body began to slip off the boom. He saw fiery foam below, but as he braced himself for the plunge the next man seized him. It looked as if they must both slip off, for Marston found no hold for his hands on the smooth, wet spar. Perhaps the pressure of the wind saved them by forcing

their limp bodies against the boom, for the other man steadied Marston until his foot touched the rope again.

For a moment or two they hung on, not daring to move and waiting until they gathered strength. Then they carefully worked their way to the inner end of the spar and dropped, exhausted, on the deck. There was however, no rest for them. The massive boom must be dragged back and dropped into its crutch. It could not be left to lurch about and smash all it struck. Marston was vaguely conscious that a gang of Krooboys ran to the mainsheet and Wyndham directed their efforts. He, himself, could do no more, and he leaned against the rail, breathing hard.

As his exhaustion vanished he began to note things. The men had secured the boom; but the schooner's bows looked bare and he remembered the jibs had blown away. The foresail was torn and half-lowered, and the gaff at its head was jambed. The torn canvas kept the vessel from falling off the wind, but would not bring her up enough for her to lie to. Masts and deck were horribly slanted, the windward bulwark was hove high up, and luminous spray drove across its top. It looked as if she were going over and there was an appalling din, for the scream of the tornado pierced the thunder.

Then lightning enveloped the yacht and ran along the water. For an instant Marston saw Wyndham's white figure at the wheel, and then he groped his way towards him in the puzzling dark. Harry would need help, for Marston knew what he meant to do. Since *Columbine* would not come up, he was going to run her off before the wind in order to ease the horrible pressure that bore her down. The trouble was, the

tornado blew from sea, and land was near. Marston seized the wheel, and using all his strength, helped Wyndham to pull it round. She felt her rudder and began to swing, lifting her lee rail out of the water. Then she came nearly upright with a jerk, and although the tornado was deafening, Marston thought he heard the water roar as it leaped against her bows.

The speed she made lifted her forward and a white wave curled abreast of the rigging. She was going like a train and Marston sweated and gasped as he helped at the wheel. There was nothing to do but let her run, although it was obvious she could not run long. A glance at the lighted compass indicated that she was heading for the land, where angry surf beat upon an inhospitable beach. If they tried to bring her round, the masts would go and she might capsize.

She drove on and presently the thunder stopped. Rain that fell in sheets swept the deck and beat their clothes against their skin. One heard nothing but the roar of the deluge and the darkness could not be pierced. After a few minutes Marston felt the strain on the wheel get easier and lost the sense of speed. The deck did not seem to be lifted forward and he thought the bows had resumed their proper level. When he turned his head the rain no longer lashed his face, the foresail flapped, and the straining, rattling noises began again. It looked as if the wind had suddenly got light.

"Let's bring her round," he shouted and heard his voice hoarse and loud.

Wyndham signed agreement, they turned the wheel, and the crew ran about the deck. She came round and a few minutes afterwards headed out to sea, lurch-

ing slowly across the swell that now rolled and broke with crests of foam. The sky had cleared, but not far off an ominous rumble came out of the gloom astern.

"We'll wait for daybreak before we make sail," Wyndham remarked. "You can get below. My watch has begun."

"I suppose you were with me on the boom?"

"I was on the boom," said Wyndham. "Somebody else was near."

"Do you imply you didn't know whom it was when you held me up?"

"Oh, well," said Wyndham, laughing, "it's not important. Suppose I had grabbed a Krooboy who was falling? Do you imagine I ought to have let him go? Anyhow, we helped each other. I don't expect I'd have reached the deck if I had been alone."

Marston said no more. One felt some reserve when one talked about things like that. He looked to windward, and seeing the night was calm, went below.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

MARSTON lounged with languid satisfaction on a locker in the stern cabin. He had borne some strain and his body felt strangely slack although his brain was active. The cabin was small and very plain, because the yacht had been altered below decks when she was fitted for carrying cargo. Moisture trickled down the matchboarded ceiling, big warm drops fell from the beams, and a brass lamp swung about as she rolled. Marston, however, knew this was an illusion; the beams moved but the lamp was still.

There were confused noises. Water washed about inside the lurching hull, although a sharp clank overhead indicated that somebody was occupied at the pump; water gurgled, with a noise like rolling gravel, outside the planks. Timbers groaned, a seam in the matchboarding opened and shut, and a dull concussion shook the boat when her bows plunged into the swell. The swell was high, although the wind had dropped. Marston knew these noises and found them soothing. They belonged to the sea, and he loved the sea, although he had not long since fought it for his life. Now the strain was over, he felt the struggle with the tornado had braced and steadied him.

In the tropics, it was the land he did not like. Perhaps he was getting morbid, for after all he had not seen much of the African coast and yet it frankly

daunted him. His confused recollections were like a bad dream; muddy lagoons surrounded by dreary mangroves from which the miasma stole at night, hot and steamy forests where mysterious dangers lurked, and rotting damp factories from which the burning sun could not drive the shadow that weighed the white man down. Marston was not imaginative, but he had felt the gloom.

He pondered about it curiously. The shadow was, so to speak, impalpable; vague yet sinister. Now and then white men rebelled against it with noisy revels, but when the liquor was out the gloom crept back and some drank again until they died. Yet the coast had a subtle charm, against which it was prudent to steel oneself. The shadow was a reflection of the deeper gloom in which the naked bushmen moved and served the powers that rule the dark.

Fever-worn traders declared there were such powers. One heard strange stories that the men who told them obviously believed. It looked as if the Ju-Ju magicians were not altogether impostors; they knew things the white man did not and by this knowledge ruled. Their rule was owned and firm. Marston had thought it ridiculous, but now he doubted. There was something behind the hocus-pocus; something that moved one's curiosity and tempted one to rash experiment. Marston knew this was what he feared. Harry was rash and had rather felt the fascination than the gloom.

Marston banished his disturbing thoughts and began to muse about their struggle with the sail. Harry was a normal, healthy white man then. It was rather his sailor's instincts than conscious resolution that led him

to keep up the fight when it looked as if he must be thrown off the boom. He would have been thrown off before he owned he was beaten. One did things like that at sea, because they must be done, and did not think them fine. Marston reviewed the fight, remembering his terror when he slipped and how his confidence returned after Harry seized his arm. The thought of the lonely plunge had daunted him; it was different when he knew he would not plunge alone. If Harry and he could not reach the deck, they would drop into the dark together. That was all, but it meant much. For one thing, it meant that Marston must go where his comrade went, although he might not like the path. In the meantime he was tired and got into his bunk.

When he went on deck in the morning the breeze was fresh and *Columbine* drove through the water under all plain sail, for they had some spare canvas on board. The sky was clear and the sun sparkled on the foam that leaped about the bows and ran astern in a broad white wake. The old boat was fast and there was something exhilarating in her buoyant lift and roll. Marston and Wyndham got breakfast under an awning on deck. Wyndham wore thin white clothes and a silk belt. His skin was burned a dark red and his keen blue eyes sparkled. One saw the graceful lines of his muscular figure; he looked alert and virile.

"You're fresh enough this morning," Marston remarked. "My back is sore and my arms ache. It was a pretty big strain to secure the gaff."

Wyndham laughed. "If the sail had blown away from us, the mast would have gone and the boat have drifted into the surf."

"I suppose we knew this unconsciously. Anyhow, I didn't argue about the thing."

"You held on," said Wyndham. "Well, I expect it's an example of an instinct men developed when they used the old sailing ships. They must beat the sea or drown, and sometimes the safety of all depended on the nerve of one. I expect it led to a kind of class-conscientiousness. The common need produced a code."

"The instinct's good. Somehow, all you learn at sea is good; I mean, it's morally bracing."

Wyndham smiled and indicated a faint dark line that melted into the horizon on the starboard hand.

"It's different in Africa, for example?"

"Oh, well," said Marston cautiously, "Africa has drawbacks, but if you don't get fever and are satisfied to look at things on the surface, you might stay there sometime and not get much harm."

Wyndham saw Marston meant to warn him and was amused. Bob was rather obvious, but he was sincere.

"Suppose you're not satisfied with things as they look on the surface and want to find out what they are beneath?" he asked.

"Then I think you ought to clear out and go back to the North."

"A simple plan! As a rule, your plans are simple. I'm curious, however, and sometimes like to indulge my curiosity. It's easily excited in Africa. There is much the white man doesn't know; he's hardly begun to grasp the negro's point of view."

"The negro has no point of view. He gropes in the dark."

"I doubt it," said Wyndham thoughtfully. "I rather imagine he sees a light, but perhaps not the light we know. There's a rude order in his country and men with knowledge rule. The Leopards, the Ghost Crocodiles, and the other strange societies don't hold power for nothing. Power that's felt has some foundation."

"You like power," Marston remarked.

Wyndham smiled and looked about while he felt for another cigarette. *Columbine,* swaying rhythmically to the heave of the swell, drove through the sparkling water with a shower of spray blowing across her weather bow. Her tall canvas gleamed against the blue sky. A Krooboy lounged at the wheel, the most part of his muscular body naked and a broad blue stripe running down his forehead. Two or three more squatted in the shade of a sail. At the galley door the cook sang a monotonous African song. The wire shrouds hummed like harpstrings, striking notes that changed with the tension as the vessel rolled. There was nothing to do but lounge and talk and Wyndham's mood was confidential.

"I have not known much power," he said. "In England, power must be bought. My father was poor but careless; my mother was sternly conventional. When he died she tried to turn my feet into the regular, beaten path. I know now she was afraid I would follow my ancestors' wandering steps. Well, at school, I had the smallest allowance among the boys, and learned to plot for things my comrades enjoyed. As a rule, I got the things. I don't know if the effort was good or not, but I was ambitious and wanted a

leading place. Folks like you don't know what it costs to hold one's ground."

"I expect I got things easily," Marston agreed. "Perhaps this was lucky, because I've no particular talent."

"You have one talent that is worth all mine," Wyndham rejoined with some feeling. "People trust you, Bob."

Marston colored, but Wyndham went on: "When I left school and went to Wyndhams' there was not much change. For the most part, my friends were rich, and I had a clerk's pay, with a vague understanding that at some far off time I might be the head of the house. The house was obviously tottering; I did not think it would stand until I got control. My uncle, Rupert's brother, would not see. Wyndhams' had stood so long he felt it was self-supporting and would stand. Well, he was kind, and I'm glad he died without knowing how near we really were to a fall.

"However, I didn't mean to talk about the house, but rather about my life when I was a shipping clerk. I had ambition and thought I had talent; I hated to be left behind by my friends. It cost much planning to share their amusements, join a good yacht club, and race my boat. Sportsmen like you don't know the small tricks and shabbiness we others are forced to use. Well, at length my uncle died and I got control of the falling house, with its load of debt. I'd long been rash, but the rashest thing I did was when I fell in love with Flora. Yet she loved me, and Chisholm, with some reserves, has given his consent. I have got to satisfy him and with this in view, we're bound

for the Caribbean on board a thirty-year-old yacht."

Marston thought Wyndham did not look daunted. In a sense, his venture was reckless, but Harry tried, and did, things others thought beyond their powers. On the whole Marston imagined his boldness was justified.

"If money can help, you know where it can be got," he said.

Wyndham's half-ironical glance softened.

"Thanks, Bob! So far, I haven't gone begging from my friends; but if I can use your money without much risk, I will borrow. I think you know this."

"What's mine is yours," Marston remarked and went to the cabin for a chart, with which he occupied himself.

He studied the chart and sailing directions when he had nothing to do and was rather surprised that Wyndham did not. It was a long run to the Caribbean and would be longer if they drifted into the equatorial calms. Marston had a yacht master's certificate, although he was rather a seaman than a navigator. He could find his way along the coast by compass and patent-log, but to steer an ocean course was another thing. One must be exact when one calculated one's position by the height of the sun and stars.

For some time they made good progress and then the light wind dropped and *Columbine* rolled about in a glassy calm. The swell ran in long undulations that shone with reflected light, and there was no shade, for they lowered all sail to save the canvas from burning and chafing. The sun pierced the awning, and it was intolerably hot. They had reached the dangerous part of the old slavers' track; the belt of stagnant

ocean where the south wind stopped and the north-east had not begun. The belt had been marked long since by horrors worse than wreck, for while the crowded brigs and schooners drifted under the burning sun, fresh water ran out and white men got crazed with rum while negroes died from thirst.

Wyndham lounged one morning under the awning after his bath. He wore silk pyjamas, a red silk belt, and a wide hat of double felt. He looked cool and Marston thought he harmonized with his surroundings; the background of dazzling water, the slanted masts that caught the light as they swung, and the oily black figures of the naked crew. He wondered whether Harry had inherited something from ancestors who had known the tragedies of the middle passage. Marston himself was wet with sweat, his eyes ached, and his head felt full of blood.

"We may drift about for some time," he said, throwing down a book he had tried to read. "The sailing directions indicate that the Trades are variable near their southern limit."

"It's a matter of luck," Wyndham agreed, and Marston started because his comrade's next remark chimed with his thoughts. "When I studied some of the house's old records I found that two of our brigs vanished in the calm belt. One wondered how they went. Fire perhaps, or the slaves broke the hatch at night. Can't you picture their pouring out like ants and bearing down the drunken crew? The crews did drink; slaving was not a business for sober men. Hogsheads of rum figure in our old victualing bills."

He paused and resumed with a hard smile: "Well, it was a devilish trade. One might speculate whether

the responsibility died with the men engaged in it and vanished with the money they earned. None of the Wyndhams seem to have kept money long; luck went hard against them. When they did not squander, misfortune dogged the house."

"Superstition!" Marston exclaimed.

Wyndham laughed. "It's possible, but superstition's common and all men are not fools. I expect their fantastic imaginings hold a seed of truth. Perhaps somebody here and there finds the seed and makes it grow."

"In Africa, they water the soil with blood. It's not a white man's gardening." Marston rejoined and went forward to the bows, but got no comfort there.

The sea shone like polished steel, heaving in long folds without a wrinkle on its oily surface. But for the sluggish rise and fall, one might have imagined no wind had blown since the world was young.

For a week *Columbine* rolled about, and then one morning faint blue lines ran across the sea to the north. Gasping and sweating with the effort, they hoisted sail and sent up the biggest topsail drenched with salt water. Sometimes it and the light balloon jib filled and although the lower canvas would not draw, *Columbine* began to move. One could not feel her progress, there was no strain on the helm, but silky ripples left her side and slowly trailed astern.

For all that, she went the wrong way, heading south into the calm, and they could not bring her round. Her rudder had no grip when they turned the wheel, and sometimes she stopped for an hour and then crawled on again. The Krooboys panted in the shade of the shaking sails, and Marston groaned and

swore when he took his glasses and slackly climbed the rigging. The dark-blue lines were plainer, three or four miles off, and he thought they marked the edge of the Trade-breeze.

Wyndham alone looked unmoved; he lay in a canvas chair under the awning, and smoked and seemed to dream. Marston wondered what he dreamed about and hoped it was Flora. In the afternoon Marston felt he must find some relief.

"I want to launch a boat and tow her," he said. "There's wind enough not far off to keep her steering."

Wyndham nodded. "Very well. It's recorded that they towed the *Providence* for three days and used up a dozen negroes in the boats, besides some gallons of rum. The fellow who kept the log was obviously methodical. However, I want to keep our boys, and you can't tow in the sun."

"It's unthinkable," Marston agreed. "We'll begin at dark."

CHAPTER VII

THE TOW

AT sunset they hoisted out two boats, for wages are low in Africa and *Columbine* carried a big crew. Wyndham stopped on board to steer while Marston went in the gig, and the sun touched the horizon when he began to uncoil a heavy warp. He was only occupied for a few minutes but when he had finished it was dark. The relief from the glare was soothing and the gloom was marked by a mistiness that gave him hope. He knew a faint haze often follows the North-East Trades.

The Krooboys dipped the oars, and the water glimmered with luminous spangles under the blades and fell like drops of liquid fire. This was all the light, except for the sparkle at *Columbine's* bows as she slowly forged ahead. She came on, towering above the boats in a vague dark mass, until she sank with the swell and the tightening rope jerked them rudely back. On heaving water, towing a large vessel is strenuous work, for her progress is a series of plunges and one cannot keep an even strain on the rope.

When they began to row Marston's boat was drawn back under the yacht's iron martingale. Her bowsprit loomed above it, threatening and big, and the oars bent as the Kroos drove the boat ahead. In a few moments she stopped and forged back towards the yacht, but the jerk was less violent. *Columbine* was

moving faster and the heavy warp worked like a spring, easing the shock. Marston's business, however, was to tow her round and when she began to turn he had trouble to keep his boat in line. The tightening rope rasped across her stern, the gig swerved and listed over, until it looked as if she would capsize. The oars on one side were buried deep, the men could not clear them for another stroke, and the threatening martingale rose and fell close astern.

Marston, when the rope would let him, sculled with a long oar, and presently the skin peeled from his hands. His throat got parched, sweat ran down his face and he gasped with straining breath, but it was better to use his strength than risk the martingale's being driven into his back. They pulled her round and it was easier afterwards although he could not relax much. The yacht was stealing through the water, but they must keep up her speed or the violent jerks would begin again. It was only possible to rest for a moment on the crest of the swell when the warp absorbed the backward pull.

A negro began to sing and the rest took up the chorus. The air was strange and dreary but somehow musical, and Marston imagined it was very old. He understood the Kroos had sung their paddling chanties long before the Elizabethan slavers touched the fever-coast. The night was very calm and dark. The figures of the men were indistinct, but when the song stopped Marston heard their labored breathing and the regular splash of oars. They rowed well and he hoped their toil was not wasted. By daybreak they might reach the edge of the wind, but the fickle

zephyrs might die away and the fiery dawn break across another glassy calm.

When he was not sculling Marston mused. He was rich and owned it strange that he was there, laboring in the boat, as the slavers labored when they towed the *Providence,* two hundred years ago. He wondered why men went to sea in sailing ships, to bear fatigues nobody endured at home, to fight for life on slanted yards, and stagger waist-deep about flooded decks. Yet one went, and sometimes went for no reward. The thing was puzzling.

After all, the sea had a touch of romance one felt nowhere else. It was something to brave the middle passage, although one had enough fresh water and no frenzied slaves on board. Marston thought about the old brigs — they towed the *Providence* three days, under the burning tropic sun. He could picture her. She rode low in the water, with her stone ballast, and freight of parched humanity packed close on the tween-decks and in the bottom hold. She had tall masts, for speed was needed, and the weight aloft would make her plunge and roll. The jerks on the towline embarrassed the boats, but white men drove the exhausted negroes with whips and curses until they dropped the oars and died. Yet they towed her three days.

Marston could not see his watch and wondered how long it was to sunrise. It was unthinkable they should go on rowing in the heat of day; he was tired now and remembering the dark ripples alone sustained him. He thought they had nearly reached the spot where the surface was disturbed, but the fickle puffs of wind might have dropped. Stopping sculling for a few

moments, he turned his head. His face was wet with sweat but he felt no coolness on his skin. It was very dark and ominously calm.

He took up the long oar again, twisting it with bleeding hands and bracing his legs. They must keep *Columbine* moving and his business was to hold the boat straight; trouble with the warp would follow if she took a sheer. For all that, he could not hold out long. He had taken life easily and his body revolted from the strain. In fact, he was beaten now, but it counted for much that the Krooboys rowed. They were raw savages and he was white. They owned his control, but all the advantages money could buy for him had gone. Nothing was left but the primitive strength and stubbornness of human nature. He must not be beaten; he owed it to the ruling stock from which he sprang, and with a stern effort he tugged at the oar.

At length, he felt an elusive chill, and wiping his wet face, looked about. In the east, it was not quite so dark, and when he turned his head the yacht looked blacker and not so large. Hull and sails were no longer blurred; their outline was getting sharp, and he noted that the balloon jib swelled in a gentle curve. One side of his face got cold and when he began to scull again he thought the strain on the rope was less.

A belt of smoky red spread swiftly along the horizon, he heard the high gaff topsail flap, booms rattled and then the yacht got quiet. The towrope sank and when it tightened there was no jerk. *Columbine* was stealing up behind them.

"In oars!" said Marston hoarsely. "Let go the warp!"

The boat drifted back to the schooner and bumped against her side until somebody caught a trailing rope. Marston with an effort climbed the rail and dropping on deck saw Wyndham at the wheel.

"Shall we hoist in? The boys are done," he said.

Wyndham nodded. "Day's breaking; it will soon be blazing hot. The sun may kill the wind, but I don't know. It's a fiery dawn."

Blocks began to rattle and when the first boat swung across the rail Marston looked about. Broad beams of light stretched across the sky and the red sun rose out of the sea. He went to a chair under the awning and threw himself down. He had earned a few minutes' rest, but when they had gone he did not move and Wyndham smiled as he noted his even breath. Beckoning a Krooboy, he sent him for a blanket and gently covered the sleeping man.

Marston was wakened by a lurch that threw him off the chair, and getting up stiffly he noted the sharp slant of deck. Then he saw foam boil behind the lee rail and straining curves of canvas that kept their hollowness when the yacht rolled to windward. She trailed a snowy wake across the backs of the sparkling seas and her rigging hummed on a high, piercing note. The sky was blue, but the blue was dim and the sunshine had lost its dazzling glare. One felt a bracing quality in the breeze.

"Looks as if we had hit the *Trades*," he said. "What's her course?"

"About North, North-west," said Wyndham, who sat on the stern grating and indicated the Kroo at the wheel. "Bad Dollar is steering by the wind. I reckoned we had better make some northing while

we can. Off our course, but the *Trades* are fickle in this latitude. Suppose you get your sextant. It's close on twelve o'clock."

Marston looked at the nearly vertical sun and laughed.

"I feel as if I'd just gone to sleep," he said and went below.

The breeze freshened and held, *Columbine* with all plain sail set made good speed, and they laid off a straight course on the big Atlantic chart. The risks of the middle passage were left behind. If they were lucky, she would reach far across on the starboard tack, without their shifting a rope.

Their hopes were justified and at length they made Barbadoes, and sailing between the Windward Isles, entered the Caribbean. One phase of the adventure was over, but Marston with vague misgivings realized that another had begun. Somehow he felt he had not done with the shadow he had shrunk from in Africa. For all that, nothing happened to disturb him as they followed the coast, stopping now and then at an open roadstead, and now and then in the stagnant harbor of an old Spanish town. Indeed, Marston found much that was soothingly familiar; smart liners, rusty cargo boats, and busy hotels. In parts, the towns had been modernized, but civilized comforts, and sometimes luxuries, contrasted sharply with decay and customs that had ruled since the first Spaniards came.

Wyndhams' had agents and correspondents at a number of the ports, but, as a rule, they were dark-skinned gentlemen of uncertain stock. They lived at old houses with flat tops and central patios, where the kitchen generally adjoined the stable, and transacted

their business in rooms from which green shutters kept out the light. The business was accompanied by the smoking of bitter tobacco and draining of small *copitas* of scented liquor. They declared their houses were Wyndham's, but did not present him and Marston to their women.

Except for some American and German merchants they saw few white people. The citizens were mulattos of different shades, negroes, and half-breeds who sprang from Spanish and Indian stock, although it was often hard to guess what blood ran in the *Mestizos'* veins. For the most part, they were a cheerful, careless lot; the coast basked in sunshine, with high, blue mountains for a background, and Marston felt nothing of the gloom and mystery that haunted the African rivers. At some of the ports Wyndham made arrangements for the extension of the house's trade, but Marston could not tell if he was satisfied or not.

When they lounged one evening on the veranda of a big white hotel, Marston led his comrade firmly to talk about business. The hotel had long since been the home of a Spanish grandee, and although the back was ruinous the Moorish front had been altered and decorated by American enterprise. Marston thought it a compromise between the styles of Tangiers and Coney Island. The rash American had gone and the *Fonda Malaguena* owned the rule of a fat and urbane gentleman who claimed to have come from Spain. For all that, the *Malaguena* was comfortable, and after the yacht's cramped, hot cabin, Marston liked the big shaded rooms. The wine and food were better than he had thought, and as he sat, looking out

between the pillars, with a cup of very good coffee in front of him, he was satisfied to stay a few more days. Small tables occupied part of the pavement, white-clothed waiters moved about, and people talked and laughed. A band played in the plaza and tram cars jingled along the narrow street. There was a half moon and one could see the black mountains behind the ancient town.

"I don't know if I ought to grumble, but it's obvious there's not much money to be earned at the ports we've touched," Wyndham remarked. "Where steamers call and trade is regularly carried on, competition cuts down profits. You must use a big capital if you want a big return."

"It's the usual line," said Marston. "I think it's sound."

Wyndham smiled. "You like the usual line! The trouble is, my capital is small."

"Then, you have another plan?"

"I have some notions I hope to work out. Wyndhams' have agents and stores at places farther along the coast. Steamers can't get into the lagoons and we use sailing boats. The trade's small and risky, but the profit's big. We'll push on and see what can be done, although I don't expect too much."

Martson pondered. He wanted to help Wyndham and had sometimes felt his sportsman's life was rather objectless. For one thing, he might provide himself with an occupation and perhaps stop Harry's embarking on rash adventures. To invest his money would give him some control.

"Could you make the business pay if you had a larger capital?" he asked.

"There are pretty good grounds for imagining so," Wyndham replied.

"Very well! I have more money than I need and have been looking for a chance to use my talents. So far I've kept them buried, and if I don't dig them up soon, they might rust away. If you agree, I'd like to make a start now and try a business speculation." He named a sum and added: "You promised you'd take my help when you saw how you could use the money."

"You're generous, Bob," Wyndham remarked with a touch of feeling, and then smiled. "However, I know you pretty well and think I understand your plan. You want to keep me out of trouble and see I take the prudent line. But was the plan yours or Mabel's?"

"Mine," said Marston, rather shortly. "All the same, I imagine Mabel would approve. But this has nothing to do with it and you needn't invent an object for me. I'm looking for a good investment. My lawyers only get me three or four per cent."

"Then you make no stipulation?"

"I do not," said Marston. "You will have control and command my help. If I couldn't trust you with my money, I would not have gone to Africa with you. I won't grumble if you lose the lot. The thing's a speculation."

Wyndham knitted his brows for a few moments and then looked up.

"You're a very good sort, Bob. I'll take the loan."

"It's not a loan," said Marston firmly. "I'm buying a partnership."

"A partner is responsible for all losses and liabilities. A lender is not; he only risks the sum he invests."

"Of course," said Marston. "I understand that."

A touch of color came into Wyndham's face, but he smiled.

"Oh, well, I knew you had pluck!"

Marston got up. "Now we have agreed, we'll get to work. Let's see if the telegraph office is open. To begin with, we'll buy the lot of ballata your agent at the other port talked about."

Wyndham laughed and they set off up the hot street.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAGOON

AFTER a few days, *Columbine* sailed west, and one night lurched slowly across the languid swell towards the coast. There was a full moon, but Marston, standing near the negro pilot at the wheel, could not see much. Mist drifted about the forest ahead and he heard an ominous roar of surf. Although no break in the coast was distinguishable, the schooner was obviously drifting with the tide toward an opening. The wind was light and blew off the land, laden with a smell of spices and river mud. Marston did not like the smell: he had known it in Africa and when one felt the sour damp one took quinine. He had studied the chart, which did not tell him much, and since there were no marks to steer for he must trust the negro pilot.

There was a risk about going in at night and Marston would sooner have hove to and waited, but the tide rose a few inches higher than at noon, and Wyndham seldom shirked a risk when he had something to gain. By and by he jumped down from the rail where he had been using the lead.

"I expect we'll get in, but I don't know about getting out if we're loaded deep," he said.

"Do you expect much of a load?" Marston asked, because the chart did not indicate a port.

"It depends on our luck. Small quantities of stuff

come down; scarce dyestuffs, rubber, and forest produce that manufacturing chemists use. We have a half-breed agent. White men can't stand the climate long, and the natives are rather a curious lot."

"Negroes?" said Marston thoughtfully.

Wyndham laughed. "There are negroes. I understand the population's pretty mixed, with a predominating strain of African blood. I expect you don't like that, but trade's generally good at places where steamers don't touch. Profits go up when competition's languid."

Marston did not like it. He had thought his giving Wyndham money would limit their business to trading at civilized ports. He imagined Harry knew this and ought to have been satisfied, but he banished his feeling of annoyance. After all, he had made no stipulation and was perhaps indulging an illogical prejudice. He must, of course, trust his partner.

The yacht stopped with a sudden jar and her stern swung round. The sails flapped and her main boom lurched across and brought up with a crash. She bumped hard once or twice, and then floated off and went on again. The misty forest was nearer and a dim white belt indicated surf. It looked as if they were steering for an unbroken beach. Then a wave of thicker mist rolled about them and the forest was blotted out. Wyndham jumped on the rail, and Marston heard the splash of the lead. After that there was silence except for the roar of the surf, and Marston went forward to see if the anchor was clear, but Wyndham said nothing and the schooner stole on. Although the breeze was very light, the tide carried her forward and Marston felt there was something

ghostly about her noiseless progress. By and by, however, Wyndham threw the lead on the deck.

"Another half-fathom! We're across the shoals," he said. "I expect the pilot trusts the stream to keep us in the channel."

Marston nodded. He saw trees in front, and in one place, a dark blur, faintly edged by white, that he thought was a bank of mud, but all was vague and somehow daunting. The trees got blacker, although they were not more distinct, the sails flapped and then hung limp. The pilot called out, and when Marston gave an order the anchor plunged and the silence was broken by the roar of running chain. This died away when *Columbine* swung, and except for the languid rumble of the surf all was quieter than before. The pilot got on board his canoe and vanished in the mist, and a few minutes afterwards Marston went to the cabin. It was very hot, but when malaria lurks in the night mist one does not sleep on deck.

When he awoke in the morning the cabin floor slanted, and going on deck he saw why the pilot had told them to let the boom rest on the port quarter. The tide had ebbed and although its rise and fall was not large, belts of mud and channels of yellow water occupied the bed of the lagoon. All round were dingy mangroves that overlapped and hid the entrance. A little water flowed past the yacht, but it was plain that her bilge rested on the ground. The bottom shelved, but the heavy boom inclined her up the bank. There was nobody about and nothing indicated that anybody ever visited the spot. Marston frowned, because it was hard to persuade himself he was not in Africa.

About noon a canoe arrived with two negroes on board and Marston and Wyndham were paddled to a village some miles up a creek. It was a poor place; small, whitewashed mud houses, a rusty iron store, and a row of squalid huts occupied a clearing in the forest. Wyndhams' agent had a house by the creek and received his visitors in his office. Outside the sand was dazzling, but the office was dark and comparatively cool. A reed curtain covered the window, which had no glass, there was no door, and little puffs of wind blew in. Don Felix was a fat and greasy mulatto, dressed in soiled white duck, with a broad red sash, in which an ornamental Spanish knife was stuck.

He brought out some small glasses and a bottle of scented liquor and they began to talk and smoke. The agent's English was not good and he now and then used French and Castilian words. Marston noted that he talked about a number of unimportant matters before he touched on business, and seemed unwilling to come to the subject.

"I can give you a load, but trade is bad," he said at length, and turned to the window with a gesture that seemed to indicate the forest. "The people up there are lazy and for some time have not brought much produce down."

"It's natural produce, I suppose? Stuff that grows itself," Marston remarked. "There isn't much cultivation in the bush?"

Don Felix shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* Who knows what they do up yonder? These people they are *drôle.* Sometimes they bring me cargo. Sometimes they come to beg; there is a *fiesta* in their village, they

make *fandango, jamboree.* The trader pays for the *fiesta* and gets back nothing."

"Then why do you pay?"

"It is better," Don Felix replied and looked at the door, as if to see there was nobody about. "They are *bete,* the *Mestizos,* but when one is wise one does not make enemies. There is much Obeah in the bush."

"*Obeah's* something like African Ju-Ju? Magic of a sort?" Marston suggested.

"Something like that," Wyndham agreed. "I don't know much about it." He looked at the agent. "Do you?"

Don Felix made the sign of the cross. "Me, I am good Catholic; I know nothing. They are *drôle* in the bush. When I think about their folly I laugh."

"Not always, I imagine," Wyndham remarked dryly. "However, we must persuade these folks we have goods they'd find useful. That's the beginning of trade. When a man sees he needs things somebody else has got, he gets to work and looks for something to sell. Now let's consider ——"

Marston listened while his comrade talked. Harry sometimes surprised people who did not know him well. He was romantic but he had a calculating vein. Harry could plan and bargain, and Marston reflected that while the Wyndhams had long been adventurers they were traders, too. After an hour's talk he had arranged much that promised to help the agent's business and they went back to the creek.

"In a way, we're lucky," Wyndham observed while they paddled down stream. "The people we're going to deal with are nearly pure Africans and we know something about negroes."

Marston said nothing. He did not know if they were lucky or not and rather doubted.

They returned to the schooner and in the morning cargo began to arrive. Two or three days afterwards Wyndham went off to the village with some of the crew and Marston gave the others leave to go ashore. Neither the boys nor Wyndham came back at dark, but this did not matter. Although the schooner rose upright for a few hours when the tide flowed, she would not float until the new moon, and the muddy lagoon was as smooth as a pond.

In the evening Marston sat in the little stern cabin. It was very hot and his brain was dull but he did not want to go to bed until the crew arrived. Moisture dripped from the ceiling and flies hovered round the lamp that hung at an angle to the beams. The skylight was open a few inches and although the opening was covered by mosquito gauze one could not keep out the flies. Marston hated their monotonous buzzing, for there is something about a mangrove swamp that frays a white man's nerves. Water lapped against the planks and now and then there was a splash in the mud. The tide was flowing and Marston imagined the water round the vessel was three or four feet deep. It looked as if Wyndham meant to stay away all night, and Marston wondered with a slight uneasiness what was keeping him.

A mahogany medicine chest stood on the small swing table. It was of the type supplied to British merchant ships, but larger, and the London chemists had fitted it with the latest drugs used in the tropics. There was a book about them and Marston had meant to re-arrange the bottles and packets, which had got

displaced. He was not a doctor, but he had studied the book and found it interesting. Tropical diseases were strange and numerous, and he had made some cautious experiments on the crew. Now his head ached rather badly and he wondered whether he would take some quinine.

Presently he put down the book and listened. Something had disturbed him, but for a few moments he only heard the splash of the tide. Then the scuttle over his head opened and a naked foot felt for the ladder. The foot was white underneath, but although he was somewhat startled, Marston did not think this strange. He had noted that negroes' and mulattos' soles are often lighter in color than the rest of their skin.

He sat still until a half naked man, who came backwards down the ladder, turned and confronted him with an apologetic smile. The fellow was old and his face was wrinkled and a curious yellow color. Marston had in Africa seen badly jaundiced white men look something like that, although the sickly tint was not so dark. A network of red veins covered his eyes but they looked as if they had been blue. His hair was all white. He put a small carved calabash on the table and then squatted on the cabin floor.

Marston frowned and waited. The carving had an African touch and it was an African custom for a visitor to bring a present. The negroes called it a *dash*.

"Cappy lib for village?" the mulatto remarked and Marston nodded.

He had not heard a canoe and wondered how the fellow got on board, since his thin cotton clothes were

dry. Moreover, although the half-breeds Marston had met generally used creole French or uncouth Castilian, the other said *lib for,* like a West African.

"Bad country; white man sick too much. You sick now?" the mulatto resumed, glancing at the chest.

Marston made a sign of agreement. His head ached and he felt languid. It was possible he had a mild dose of fever.

"I fix you," said the mulatto, who pulled out a small brass box and emptied some brown powder on the table. "You drink him in hot water."

"Thank you," said Marston and scraped the stuff onto a piece of paper, thinking he might experiment with it. The fellow could have no object for trying to poison him and he understood the half-breeds knew some useful cures.

"Now you dash me a drink," said the other, looking at a bottle of whisky in the rack, and Marston rather wondered why he took down the bottle. The whisky was extra good; he did not like mulattoes, and knew no reason for his entertaining his uninvited guest. Yet he put a glass on the table; one glass.

He imagined the other understood the significance of this, for his eyes momentarily narrowed. It was strange, but they now looked blue. For all that, he poured out a liberal measure of whisky and drank slowly, like a connoisseur.

Marston studied him with some curiosity and on the whole felt repelled. The old fellow looked cunning and greedy, but not debased. One got a hint of cruelty and power, and his manner was very calm.

In West Africa, Marston would perhaps have kicked him out, but pure white men are not numerous on the south and west coasts of the Caribbean and the distinction of color is relaxed. Besides, he reflected, he was engaged in trading with the natives.

"You lib for here for buy thing," the other remarked presently. "What thing you want?"

Marston mentioned some articles Wyndham had talked about, and the other nodded. "You go make me dash and you get them thing. Agent man fool man; him no savvy black man's way in bush."

"If the stuff comes along, we'll talk about the dash," Marston answered cautiously, although he did not like his visitor and wondered when he would go.

"When white cappy come back?" the old fellow asked.

"In the morning, I expect," said Marston with a yawn.

The other got up as if he were going, and turned sideways in order to pass between the swing-table and the locker. There was not much room, for one does not lean against a swing-table, which keeps its level by a counterbalance underneath when the vessel rolls. It looked as if the mulatto knew this, and Marston thought it strange. Next moment, however, he struck his naked foot against the fastenings in the deck and, stumbling, put his arm on the table. The table tilted and the medicine chest slipped off. It turned over as it fell and emptied bottles, packets, scales, and measures on the deck.

The mulatto looked at the disordered pile and made for the ladder. Marston did not stop him, although he was angry, and kneeling down began to pick up

the articles. The bottles were strong and had not broken, and in a minute or two he replaced them and the other things in the box. Then he went up the ladder and looked out on deck. A lamp hung on the forestay as a beacon for the boats and one could see the sweep of planks and line of the rail. There was nobody about and nothing broke the silence. Beyond the feeble glimmer of the lamp it was very dark, but the night was calm and Marston knew the splash of a paddle would carry far.

He crossed the deck and looked over the rail. The water caught a faint reflection and he saw muddy foam and weed float past. The tide was rising and running up the lagoon. One could hardly wade to land and it was obviously impossible to do so without making a noise. Yet his visitor had vanished and he had not heard him go. Marston remembered stories about the Ghost Leopards he had heard in Africa, and laughed, but the laugh was forced.

He went back to the cabin and, shutting the hatch, examined the medicine chest. He did not know if he was surprised to find two articles had gone; one was a bottle of laudanum and the other a packet of new and powerful drugs. The book warned one to be careful about their use. Marston lighted a cigarette and pondered. He was not certain the bottle and packet were in the box when he got it down, although he thought they were; he had sometimes taken things out when he dosed the crew and he had used laudanum. Moreover, it looked impossible that the mulatto had picked them up. So far as Marston remembered, he did stoop down or stop. Then, supposing he had taken the stuff, it was hard to see why a

man who was half a savage should steal laudanum and the other drug.

If Obeah was like West African Ju-Ju, there were no doubt men who used poison to support their claim to magical power; but strange and virulent poisons could be extracted from tropical plants. Besides the fellow had given Marston a cure for fever. Perhaps he was making a dangerous experiment, but his curiosity conquered his caution and he resolved to try the stuff. Going to the galley, he found some hot water, and as he came back noted that one could see into the cabin through the half-opened skylight. He wondered whether the mulatto had looked down and noted the medicine chest. The brown powder melted, and he swallowed the draught. Then he got into his bunk, and blowing out the lamp, presently went to sleep.

CHAPTER IX

DON FELIX'S REVOLT

WHEN Marston woke in the morning his headache and languidness had gone. It looked as if the powder the mulatto had left had cured him, and although he did not find the laudanum and packet of drugs, he resolved he would not bother about their loss. In a day or two, small lots of rather valuable cargo began to arrive and one afternoon Marston and Wyndham lounged under the awning and watched the Krooboys transfer goods from a big canoe to the yacht. Four or five negroes from up river put the fiber packages in the hoisting slings.

The men worked slackly, for although the sun was hidden the heat was extreme. A yellow haze covered the sky, but the oily surface of the lagoon shimmered with subdued light. On the other side, the reflection of the mangroves floated motionless, without a leaf quivering. Dark shadow lurked in the caves under the high roots, and here and there the massed foliage was touched by dirty white. Marston thought the trees looked as if they were blighted by some foul disease. He hated the mangroves and the smell of mud that hung about the vessel.

"The tides are beginning to get higher," he said. "It will be a relief to leave this dismal spot and go to sea."

"Calling here has paid us," Wyndham rejoined.

"We are getting stuff for which dyers and chemists give high prices; stuff I wanted but hardly expected to obtain. In fact, I'll own your mysterious visitor has earned his dash. No doubt he'll turn up again and ask for it."

"D'you reckon he had much to do with our getting the goods?"

Wyndham shrugged. "I understand he promised you the articles you talked about, and they have arrived. If he comes again, I'd like to see him. Perhaps he could be persuaded to send us something else."

"He asked for you," said Marston, and wondered whether his remark was rash when he saw Wyndham was pondering. Although Bob felt he was perhaps illogical, he did not want Harry to persuade the fellow.

"I think you said his eyes were blue," Wyndham resumed presently. "Well, one does meet a mulatto with blue eyes now and then, and it's perhaps not important that the bottom of his feet was white ——"

Wyndham stopped, for a splash of paddles broke the silence, and when a canoe stole out of the shadow across the lagoon Marston said. "We may learn something about him now. Here's your agent, Don Felix."

He thought Wyndham was going to reply, but he hesitated and then crossed the deck as the agent and another man came on board. Marston called the steward, who put a small table under the awning and brought out a bottle of choice liquor they had bought at the last port. The party sat down and Marston studied his guests. On the whole, he liked Don Felix and thought him honest. The fellow's greasy fat face was frank and his black eyes met one's glance squarely.

For all that, he thought he did not look well; there was a hint of strain about him and his hand shook when he greedily drained his glass. The climate, however, was unhealthy, and Marston turned to their other guest.

Father Sebastian was white, although his skin was dark and wrinkled. He was very thin and his threadbare clothes were slack; his hair was white and his eyes were sunk. He looked about with a frank curiosity and Marston imagined it was long since he had been on board a ship and had met civilized white men.

By and by Don Felix began to talk about the cargo and declared that he was puzzled, because he had not received so large a quantity of valuable goods for some time.

"It looks as if the people in the bush were working," he remarked and added dryly: "They work when they are forced."

Marston told him about the mulatto's visit, and Don Felix's face got dark. He drained his glass and turning to Father Sebastian repeated Marston's story in awkward French.

"I do not like it," he said, "This foul Bat! I think he is plotting again."

Father Sebastian made a sign of agreement and addressed Marston, whose curiosity was obvious. He spoke slowly, as if it cost him an effort to remember words, but Marston thought his French was good.

"An evil man! He is called the Bat because he likes the dark. Moreover they talk about bats that drink human blood."

"If there are such creatures, why don't you kill them?" Marston asked and glanced at Wyndham.

He was smoking a cigarette and looked rather bored, but Marston knew his friend and doubted.

"The Bat is hard to kill. Some have tried, but perhaps I may be luckier," Don Felix answered, and his fat, nervous fingers touched his Spanish knife. Then he shrugged. "All the same, it is possible he kills me!"

The others said nothing. Don Felix was rather theatrical, but Marston thought him strongly moved by anger or fear. By and by Don Felix went to the hatch and examined one or two of the packages the Krooboys were putting in the hold.

"What is this?" he asked. "These packages have a mark I know but I did not buy the goods."

"The shipper will, no doubt, come to you for payment and we'll engage to meet the bill," Wyndham replied. "The stuff is getting very scarce and ought to sell for a good price."

"No!" exclaimed Don Felix angrily. "I buy nothing with that mark! You must stop the boys loading the lot. Send it all back."

"Isn't this ridiculous?" Wyndham asked. "Why do you want us to refuse the goods?"

Don Felix sat down and gripped the arm of his chair hard. "The man whose mark that is is a friend of the Bat's," he said, and his voice got hoarse. "I do not know if the goods are his or the other's. but I will not buy the stuff. Bad luck would go with the money one earned by handling it."

He said something to Father Sebastian in rapid creole French and the priest turned to Wyndham.

"It is better that you send back this cargo," he re-

marked quietly. "Don Felix is an honest man. He has given you advice that may cost him much." Marston pondered, with his eyes on his guest. Father Sebastian was old and shabby; he had obviously lived long with his savage flock, but he was white. His glance was calm and thoughtful and he had a touch of dignity. Marston thought he knew much about human nature and could be trusted. Don Felix, however, got up and clenched his fist. It looked as if the company of the priest and the others had given him some resolve.

"What do I care about the cost?" he exclaimed in French. "I was afraid and I paid. Me, a good Catholic, I paid that these pigs might serve their devil! But it has gone on long, and now I stop. This dirty Bat will come between me and my employer; he leaves me out. Well, let it be so!" He paused and spread out his hand with a theatrical gesture that Marston thought was meant for the negroes in the canoe. "Now I fight. My trade is my blood. I will kill this Bat!"

Father Sebastian shook his head, but Don Felix turned to Wyndham and resumed in a defiant voice. "You will send back the packages? If not, you must get another agent."

"Very well," agreed Wyndham. "You can tell the boys to unload the goods you don't like."

He gave Don Felix a quick glance and Marston wondered whether he expected him to hesitate, but the mulatto went back to the hatch and gave his orders resolutely. Marston remembered that another lot of fiber packages had been stowed at the bottom of the

hold before the agent arrived and were now probably out of sight. Wyndham however, said nothing about these and filled Father Sebastian's glass.

"Our friend is superstitious," he remarked. "You know something about Obeah, and Voodoo magic. I expect the men who teach the cult use cunning tricks. But how much is trickery?"

"Ah," said Father Sebastian, "Who can tell? There are powers that rule the dark. You know it is permitted when you have lived in the gloom. Perhaps Don Felix is superstitious, but he takes a hard path. It is the right path; I think he is brave." Then he paused and smiled. "I am old and have lived in this country long. There is much about Voodoo and other things that puzzles me; but this I know. They who walk in the light need fear no lasting hurt."

"Sometimes one's light gets dim," said Marston.

"That is when we stray into the shadow and our eyes are dull. The light burns steadily; it will not go out."

Don Felix came back from the hatch and stopped for dinner. When he and Father Sebastian had gone, Marston asked Wyndham: "What about the other lot of goods that was already in the hold?"

"Well?" said Wyndham. "Do you see any object for our returning the stuff? For that matter, I don't know to whom it ought to be returned."

Marston said the goods could wait at the village until the owner claimed payment. "We promised Don Felix we would not take this cargo," he added.

"You mean, I promised?" Wyndham rejoined. "My promise applied to the particular lot he grum-

bled about. Anyhow, I want the goods. We can sell them for a high price."

Marston admitted that the argument was plausible, although he doubted if it were ethically sound. Still he must not be fastidiously critical about his friend. He was rich and free from one kind of temptation; Harry was poor. Wyndham noted his hesitation and resumed:

"Our voyage is not a yachting excursion. We are frankly out for what we can earn, and I'm, so to speak, now on trial. I'm young and the head of a house that people knew was tottering when I took control. Chisholm and Flora's relations have reserved their judgment; they're willing to give me a fair chance, but wait to see what I can do. Well, you know my drawbacks and how much depends on my making good. In order to do so, I'll run all risks."

Marston thought there was a risk Wyndham did not see. Flora Chisholm was honest and proud. Her lover's success would not satisfy her if she disapproved the means he used. This, however, was an awkward subject and Marston owned that to imagine Harry would give her grounds for disapproving was taking much for granted. He let the matter go and began to talk about something else.

For all that, when Wyndham left him he lighted a fresh cigarette and mused. Harry was his friend, but he began to see he had got a habit of making allowances for him that he might not have made for others. Harry had a strange charm and individuality; somehow one could not judge him by conventional rules. Then Marston remembered that Mabel had let

him go in order that he might be Harry's protector, but the dangers he was to be guarded from were not physical. Marston understood this better now and doubted if he were clever enough for the job; Mabel did not mean him to be a hypercritical prig. Anyhow, he had undertaken the job and Mabel, perhaps rather foolishly, trusted him. He threw his cigarette away and went off to superintend the stowage of the cargo.

The moon was getting small and the tides were higher when, one evening, a messenger asked them to come to the village. They went up river in the mist, and Marston felt languid and dejected. The day had been very hot and it was not much cooler at dark. The stagnant air was hard to breathe, there was something daunting in the silence, and the splash of paddles sounded harshly loud. When they landed they found Don Felix alone in his house except for a half-breed woman and Father Sebastian. He lay in a fiber hammock and Marston saw he was very ill. His black eyes were half shut, his face was a livid color and wet with clammy sweat.

The room was brightly lighted and the half-breed woman sat on the ground in a limp, huddled pose, with a black shawl hiding her shoulders and head. She did not move when the others came in, but Don Felix's glance hinted at relief, and Father Sebastian indicated two American bent-wood chairs that looked strangely out of harmony with the mud walls and floor.

"If we had known you were ill, we would have brought our medicine chest," Marston said. "What is the matter?"

"Who knows?" said Don Felix, dully, and Marston

imagined the Castilian rejoinder meant his question admitted of no reply. "I will not live until the morning, but I have lived longer than I sometimes thought. It does not matter now the good father and my friends have come. I am no more afraid."

Marston was puzzled; somehow Don Felix looked afraid. The first part of his statement was easier to understand, because Marston had learned in Africa that negroes and uncivilized half-breeds slip easily out of life and often seem to know when theirs will end. But if Don Felix was not afraid to go, what did he fear?

"Is there nobody about? Where are the working boys?" Wyndham asked.

"They have gone; they *know*," Don Felix replied, and Marston felt half daunted as he asked himself; What did the boys know? "But you will stay?" the other went on anxiously.

"Of course," said Wyndham in a quiet voice.

Father Sebastian looked up, as if to thank him, and Marston saw Harry had taken the proper line. He felt there was no use in trying to persuade Don Felix he was not very ill. It was significant that the priest had not tried.

"Now we will talk a little," Don Felix said to Wyndham. "There is some business to talk about."

Wyndham glanced at Father Sebastian, who made a sign of permission, and then got up and went to the door with Marston. They sat down on a bench outside and a beam of light and the dull voices of the others came through the door. Marston did not hear the woman; she had not spoken at all, but sat motionless and huddled. He had not seen her face and never

knew what she was like. All was quiet in the village, and outside the feeble beam the gloom was strangely deep. Marston sympathized with Don Felix's liking for plenty of light.

"What has caused his illness?" he asked.

"Poison, I think," Father Sebastian replied. "Our friend is a good Catholic, but he is half persuaded it is something else."

"The other thing's ridiculous, though I suppose they claim to use magic in the bush. But you ought to know something about native poisons."

"I know many, but Don Felix's symptoms are strange," said Father Sebastian, quietly.

Marston asked him about the symptoms and carefully noted his answers. Then he remarked: "I don't altogether understand why the boys left him."

"They were afraid. In this country, it is rash to help a victim of Voodoo."

"But they are your people; I mean, they belong to your flock."

"They are human and one must not expect too much from men who have long walked in the gloom. The old gods are powerful."

"The Obeah gods are devils!" Marston declared with an anger that rather surprised himself.

Father Sebastian glanced at the surrounding dark, in which blurred trees vaguely loomed.

"It is possible there are devils yonder. Things are done they would approve," he remarked quietly.

"I understand the Bat is Don Felix's enemy. Do you think he poisoned him?"

"I do not know. Perhaps we shall never know. In this country, many people are poisoned."

Marston clenched his fist. "Don Felix is Wyndhams' agent and I'm a partner in the house. If I find out who poisoned him, I'll see the fellow is held accountable."

He stopped, for Wyndham came to the door, beckoning the priest.

"He wants you," he said, and they went in.

Marston long remembered the next hour or two. At first Don Felix was shaken by spasms of pain and groaned, but was silent afterwards. His eyes were dull and half shut, and when they opened wider they turned apprehensively to the open door. Sometimes he glanced about the room and Marston thought he took courage when he saw Father Sebastian sitting near his hammock and Wyndham in the background. Yet he was obviously afraid and his fear was disturbing.

For the most part all was very quiet, but sometimes there were noises that jarred Marston's nerves. Although the night was calm, leaves rustled in the dark and one heard sounds like the stealthy tread of naked feet. Marston fancied shadows lurked about the edge of the beam from the door and found it hard to persuade himself he was deceived, although he knew nobody was there. For a minute or two moisture splashed outside, as if somebody had struck a branch and shaken down big drops. The noise stopped and Marston felt the silence worse.

Now and then he glanced at Wyndham. The latter did not move and looked straight in front, but his quietness was significant and his mouth was firm. Marston imagined he bore some strain, but it was often hard to tell what Harry felt and thought. At

length, Don Felix moved his hand awkwardly, as if he felt for something to which he could cling, and the slack movement did not stop until he felt Father Sebastian's grasp. His haunted look was plainer, although he was now too weak to glance at the door. It jarred Marston strangely, and getting up he went out.

Half-an-hour afterwards there was a wild cry in the house and Marston shivered. It was the woman's voice and he knew why she had cried out. Then Wyndham came to the door, and standing with his back against the light, looked about for his comrade.

"We need not stay now," he said. "He was calm at the last and had all the consolation Father Sebastian could give him. An honest man, and brave, I think, believing what it's obvious he did believe!"

"He trusted you," Marston remarked, meaningly.

"It's possible he found our being about some help. We stayed while we were needed."

"That is not what I mean," Marston rejoined. "If ever I saw a man fight with fear, I watched the horrible battle to-night! The fellow was your agent and somebody who destroyed his body sent an unthinkable horror to torment his mind. The thing's devilish! What are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do?" said Wyndham. "I have nothing to go upon."

Marston made a sign of agreement, but his face was very stern. "Some day, perhaps, we'll find out who's accountable. I mean to try."

Wyndham said nothing and they went back to the canoe.

CHAPTER X

MARSTON USES HIS POWER

SOON after Don Felix was buried two strangers visited the schooner. One was white but so burned by the sun and worn by the climate that he looked like a native. Peters was agent for a Hamburg merchant house with a factory on a neighboring lagoon, and told Wyndham he had come because he seldom met a white man. The other was a government officer and stated, apologetically, that his business was to make a few inquiries about Don Felix's death. His skin was nearly white, but his coarse lips and short, curling hair indicated a strain of negro blood.

Marston knew something about the officials who held small posts on the Caribbean coast. For the most part, they were mulattos, paid low wages and willing to augment the latter by presents and bribes. As a rule, he had found them good-humored and indolent, and he imagined Don Ramon Larrinaga would be satisfied with a few particulars and a little money. There was, he thought, no use in trying to put him on the track of the unknown poisoner. He let Wyndham take the man to the cabin and sat under the awning on deck with Peters, for whom he opened a bottle of vermouth.

Peters knew much about the country and told him some rather curious stories. He looked shriveled and desiccated, but his glance was keen and Marston

imagined he was very shrewd. Marston, however, did not study him much; it was enough that he was an amusing companion while Wyndham was occupied. By-and-by the latter opened the cabin scuttle and beckoned.

"You have some paper money, Bob. Lend me a few bills," he said.

Marston asked the sum he wanted and was surprised when Wyndham told him.

"Is it necessary to give him so much?" he asked.

"Perhaps it's advisable. We'll soon be ready for sea and I expect the fellow could keep us here while he made fresh inquiries and wrote reports. He's polite, but he rather hinted something like that. Of course, he has no notion of really finding out why Don Felix died."

"We want to find out," Marston rejoined.

Wyndham smiled. "That's another thing; the government officials don't want to bother. If we knew who was accountable, it would be hard to get them to move. However, Don Ramon is waiting——"

Marston took out his wallet and after giving Wyndham some money went back to Peters, whose eyes twinkled.

"Your partner knows the customs of the country," he remarked. "On the whole, it pays to be generous. In a climate like this, it's prudent to save oneself unnecessary trouble."

"We don't want to avoid trouble," Marston replied. "If I was persuaded our agent was poisoned and could get on the poisoner's track, I'd use some energy to follow it up."

Peters shrugged. "You can do nothing; better let

it rest. In the fever swamps, men who are well one day often die the next. It is possible they have an enemy in the bush, but the law does not reach up yonder. Sickness is common and human life is cheap."

They talked about something else until Wyndham and Larrinaga came on the deck. The latter bowed to Marston when his canoe was paddled to the gangway.

"I thank you and your partner, señor," he said. "If I can be of help, remember I am your servant."

"It was nothing," Marston replied. "I expect Señor Wyndham has told you all we know, but if you can find out anything important, you'll earn our gratitude. The man who tells me why Don Felix died can count on his reward."

Peters gave him a curious glance and smiled. "After all, the reward may perhaps be claimed. It is not likely, I admit, but things one does not look for sometimes happen."

He got into the canoe and when the negroes paddled off Marston leaned against the rail.

"I suppose we need expect nothing from Larrinaga," he remarked. "How much did you tell him?"

"All I thought it useful for him to know," said Wyndham, rather dryly. "He's a common type; lazy and greedy. Now he's got his bribe, I don't suppose he'll bother us. What did you think about the other?"

"I didn't study him much. Amusing fellow, but you get a hint of force. I imagine he's clever and a man who can hold on. Anyhow, he doesn't matter, since it's improbable we'll see him again. We'll have

the holds full in a day or two and I've had enough of the lagoon."

"All the same, I'm rather afraid we can't get away just yet."

Marston began to grumble, but Wyndham smiled.

"There are things to straighten out and now we have no agent I may be needed, but it won't be necessary for you to stay. In fact, I'd like you to take the schooner to the next port and transship the cargo. Then you could come back for me and the extra load I half expect, but I'll know more when I've been to the village, and we'll talk about this again."

Wyndham started for the village next day, and when it was getting dark Marston lounged on deck looking out for the boat. Some of the crew had gone with Wyndham, the rest were in the forecastle, and except for the cook at the galley door Marston had the deck to himself. The yacht was slowly lifting with the tide, which spread across the mud banks in the lagoon. Thin mist drifted about the mangroves and there was not a breath of wind. The water glimmered with faint reflections but in a few minutes it would be dark.

Presently Marston, looking over the rail, imagined there was somebody behind him on the deck. For a moment or two, however, he did not turn. He had heard no step and had recently felt himself highly strung. It looked as if Don Felix's death had given him a jar, but he was not going to indulge his shaken nerves. Still he felt there was somebody about and he slowly and deliberately looked round. The mulatto who had visited him before squatted on the deck, as if he had been there some time. Marston thought he

saw amusement in his wrinkled face and his anger arose.

"Cappy Wyndham lib for on board?" the old fellow asked.

"He is not on board," said Marston roughly. "What do you want?"

"You done get them cargo?"

"We did. I don't know if you had much to do with it, but I suppose you expect your dash. What would you like? Money?"

The other shook his head. "Money no good. My friend sick too much. You dash me some medicine."

Marston remembered the packet of drugs and found it needful to use some control. He did not know if the mulatto was the Bat or not, but on the whole thought he was and the horror of his watch at Don Felix's house was fresh. Yet he had nothing to go upon and would not be justified in throwing the fellow overboard. The other watched him with bloodshot eyes, and although his face was inscrutable, Marston began to feel uneasy. He wondered whether the fellow was something of a hypnotist, for he got a hint of force; force that he thought malevolent. Looking forward along the deck, he imagined he saw the cook at the galley door, but the indistinct figure vanished and Marston felt it was significant that the negro had gone inside. Then he braced himself and looked back.

"I will not give you medicine, but since we did get the cargo, perhaps you deserve something," he said. "Wait a minute."

Going to the cabin, he opened a locker in which they had put a quantity of African trade goods. The stuff was rubbish, made to please the negro's eye; brass,

jewelry, cheap scent, colored flannel jackets, and frail umbrellas. Marston picked up as much as he could carry and was conscious of rather dry amusement as he climbed the ladder. His visitor had obviously learned English in West Africa and he was going to give him the usual African dash, but he knew the old fellow had no use for the stuff. It was like giving a philosopher a child's toy.

"There you are!" said Marston, throwing down the articles. "Now get off!"

"I lib for see Cappy Wyndham," the other objected.

"Get off the ship," said Marston. "Don't come back!"

He wondered how the man would go. There was no canoe about and the water round the vessel was three or four feet deep; she lay obliquely to the beach. It was ridiculous to imagine the other had vanished on his last visit, but Marston had not seen how he went. Now, however, he meant to watch.

The mulatto picked up the load of rubbish and went forward along the deck. He jumped on the end of the bowsprit and Marston smiled, for it looked as if he could not use his tricks when one kept one's eye on him. Balancing himself cautiously, he walked along the spar and melted in the dark. But in a few moments there was a splash and Marston knew he had dropped from the bowsprit's end into shallow water. Somehow this was soothing and he went to the cabin. In an hour or two Wyndham returned and when they lighted their pipes after supper Marston remarked:

"The old fellow Don Felix imagined was the Bat turned up again."

"Ah," said Wyndham, who looked interested.

"Don Felix hadn't seen him; we don't know he is the Bat."

"Father Sebastian agreed that he was, and I haven't much doubt. He said the man was evil and I think evil's the proper word. He gives me a strange nervous shrinking. Have you felt a kind of nausea when you looked at something repulsive? Well, I feel like that when he's about."

"As a rule, you don't let your imagination carry you away." Wyndham remarked. "I expect the heat and the dismal surroundings account for much."

"Anyhow, I gave him a dash and ordered him off the boat."

Wyndham glanced up rather sharply. "Why? We have got some valuable goods, and although we'll have to pay their owners, it looks as if the old fellow was useful."

"I don't want any goods he sends," Marston rejoined. "My notion is they're better left alone. Then I'm a partner, and although I haven't meddled much, I felt I ought to use my power."

"Oh, well," said Wyndham. "You are a partner, I suppose we must let it go."

They talked about something else and next evening Marston took the schooner's dinghy and rowed down the lagoon. He had heard curlew whistle in the dark and wondered whether the birds were as wild as they are in England. For a time he followed the edge of the mangroves, where water dripped from the arched roots, and amphibious things splashed in the muddy caves; and then skirted a sloppy bank the tide flowed across. Now and then he saw a curlew but did not get a shot, and by and by he put down the oars. The

damp heat was enervating and he rested and looked about.

It would soon be dark and the mangroves cut in a straight black line against a fading orange glow. The land-breeze began to shake the leaves and now and then a pale branch moved. All was very quiet but for the dull rumble of the surf outside. Marston felt languid and vaguely disturbed. There was something about Wyndham that puzzled him. When they were at sea he did not want a better friend, but it was different when they went ashore to trade. Well, he had come to look after Harry and now understood better why Mabel had let him go. Perhaps Harry really needed to be looked after. Marston was staunch, but he knew Mabel had not altogether trusted his comrade.

There was another thing; he must soon sail the schooner to the next port and he wanted to go, but Harry meant to stay. Marston did not like this, although he could think of no logical objection. The mulatto's visits bothered him. The fellow had asked for Wyndham and somehow Marston would sooner they did not meet. Perhaps the thing was ridiculous, but he felt like that.

It got dark and although there was no obvious reason for his return he felt he ought to get back to the yacht. Recently he had felt highly strung. This was, no doubt, the consequence of pottering about the unhealthy swamps, but he must control his illogical impulses and he lighted his pipe while he let the dinghy drift with the tide.

She floated quietly up the lagoon and presently he saw *Columbine's* lights in the mist. Pulling a few languid strokes, he let the boat drift again until the

vessel's dark side was close ahead. Then he put out his hand and seized a rope. He wore rubber boots, because he had thought he might wade across the mud, and made no noise when he stepped down from the rail. There was nobody on deck, but a light shone in the cabin and when he went aft he heard voices. The skylight was open and one of the voices was the old mulatto's.

Marston stopped abruptly. He wanted to go down and turn out the fellow, but doubted if he would be justified, although he was Wyndham's partner. Somehow it was unthinkable the brute and his comrade should engage in quiet talk. For all that, he did not go, and turning back a few yards stopped again. He must not be a fool, and no doubt the fellow had come to talk about some goods his friends in the bush could supply. Marston did not want the goods, but forced himself to wait.

By and by a shadowy figure came out from the cabin hatch. It made no noise and Marston would not have seen it had not the indistinct black object for a moment cut against the light. Outside the beam from the open hatch all was misty and dark. Still Marston thought the fellow knew he was there, because he vanished as if he had gone behind the mast. Marston did not bother about him and went down to the cabin.

There was liquor on the table and Wyndham had obviously just drained the glass he held. His hand shook as he put it down, his face was rather white, and drops of sweat stood on his forehead. It looked as if he had got a knock, although Marston knew Harry's nerve was good.

"I couldn't get near the curlew, so I came back," he remarked, awkwardly.

Wyndham looked up, with an obvious effort for calm. "Oh, well, since you are here, you might turn out the boys and heave up the slack cable."

Marston noted that Wyndham's voice was hoarse, but thought it better to conquer his curiosity. Harry might give him his confidence later, and in the meantime to heave the cable taut would obviate their bringing the boys up again. The tide was rising and they wanted to float the schooner off the mud. He went forward to call the crew and the clank of the windlass and rattle of chain were soothing, since they indicated that *Columbine* was ready for sea. Marston owned that he would be glad to get away from the lagoon. He was occupied for some time and when he went back to the cabin Wyndham looked calm.

"We'll keep her off the beach after this," he said. "Sorry you didn't get a shot. The curlew seem as wild as they are at home."

"I don't want her to take the beach again," Marston remarked. "When do we sail?"

"You'll sail as soon as the pilot thinks there's water enough on the bar. He comes to-morrow."

"But you mean to stay?"

"I must stay," said Wyndham. "We haven't an agent and I'm on the track of some business I can't neglect."

Marston saw there was no use in urging his comrade to go. Harry's mouth was ominously firm. He wondered whether Harry would tell him what the mulatto had talked about, but he did not and soon after supper they went to bed.

CHAPTER XI

MARSTON GOES TO SEA

THE new moon shone in a clear sky and the tide was nearly full. Puffs of warm land-breeze shook the mangroves and drove small ripples against *Columbine's* side. She rode to the flood stream, ready for sea, and the clank of her windlass rolled across the swamps. The negro crew were shortening cable and sang as they hove at the levers.

Wyndham was talking to Peters, who had arrived in the afternoon, and Marston, standing near them, frowned. He was annoyed that Peters had come, because he had wanted to talk to Wyndham and after the other's arrival this was impossible. It was unlucky he had put it off, but he did not see why Harry had urged the fellow to stay and go back to the village with him when the schooner sailed. Marston felt rather hurt, since it almost looked as if Harry had kept Peters in order to prevent him trying to satisfy his curiosity.

Marston was curious. The old mulatto had told Harry something that had given him a bad jar; Bob could not forget his comrade's strained look when he entered the cabin, and he had found no clew to the puzzle. It was a relief to go to sea, but the satisfaction he had expected to get was dulled. He felt as if he were running away and leaving his partner when the latter needed him. Yet somebody must go and Harry would not.

"Short up, sah!" a Krooboy shouted when the windlass stopped. The pilot gave an order, and the foresail began to rise with a rattle of blocks. The canvas flapped and swelled, and Marston went forward.

"Break out the anchor," he said. "Hoist the inner jib."

Dark figures rose and fell with the windlass-bars; slowly at first, then faster, as with a harsh clank the chain ran through the pipe. Marston had generally found the noise inspiriting. It hinted at adventure on the open sea, but it did not move him now; he was not leaving the lagoon for good. Yet he was soothed when *Columbine* began to move. After lying on the mud, he liked to feel her lift as she met the gentle swell the tide brought in, and hear the ripple splash about her bows. The mangroves stole past, a gap opened in the trees, and a faintly-glittering track led out to sea.

"Hoist the mainsail," said the pilot, and the splash of ripples was louder when the dark canvas rose.

She drove out with the land-breeze and met the rollers on the bar. They were not high and hardly broke, only one here and there melting into foam. She lurched across with dry decks, and when the leadsman got deeper water the pilot brought her round and pulled up his canoe. Marston went to the gangway with Wyndham and Peters, and the latter laughed as he gave him his hand.

"I don't know if we'll meet again, but it's possible," he said. "You offered a good reward for some information not long since. I wonder whether you were rash."

"The offer stands," Marston replied. "The man who tells me all about our agent's death will find me generous."

"Oh, well," said Peters. "I can't state that I expect to claim the reward, but after all I might. Then I hope we'll both be satisfied."

Marston let him go. He would have given much for ten minutes' frank talk with Wyndham, but this was impossible. The pilot was waiting and the yacht drifting near a dangerous shoal. He resigned himself and gave his comrade his hand.

"Run no risks and take care of yourself until I come back," he said.

"Good luck!" said Wyndham and jumped into the canoe.

Marston signed to the steersman. the sails filled, and the canoe dropped astern. *Columbine* gathered speed and listed down, throwing spray about while the water foamed below her lee rail. Small white waves rolled down the glittering track ahead and Marston's mood got lighter. After all, it was a relief to put to sea; the salt wind was tonic and blew morbid thoughts away. It was bracing to grapple with breaking waves and savage squalls.

He looked astern. The canoe had vanished and a misty line indicated the land. Marston was conscious of a strange repugnance as he watched it fade. Sickness lurked in the steamy forest, where the gloom was touched by mystery and something of horror. For a time, he had done with it, and he would come back strengthened and invigorated by the change.

He gave the helmsman the course, and going to the cabin, opened a tin box that held letters for England

and manifests of cargo. He must copy these out on the bills of lading when he transshipped the goods and as he studied the lists he felt some surprise. *Columbine* did not carry much but her freight was valuable. Some had been put on board without his knowing and he thought it strange Wyndham had not talked about its cost. For example, there were small pearls. One found pearls at places on the Caribbean, but the fisheries were jealously guarded and none were near the lagoon. Then there was a packet of ambergris and Marston knew ambergris was worth much. Don Felix had said nothing about this curious stuff, which the cachalot whales throw up, and Marston wondered where Wyndham had got it.

The voyage was obviously going to pay, but the strange thing was, their cargo for the most part had come down after the agent died. To some extent this bore out Marston's conclusion that the old mulatto was the Bat and had power over Don Felix's uncivilized customers. Marston began to muse about the fellow. He had power; one felt it, although he was old and repulsive. Something indicated that he had inherited from his white ancestors qualities not often found in half-breeds. Marston began to see that this was partly why the fellow repelled him; one got a hint of intelligence put to a base use.

The matter was not important, and he pondered about his finding Wyndham and the other in the cabin. Harry was badly shaken, although Marston knew his pluck. Something very strange and startling was needed to drive the blood from his face and bring the sweat to his forehead. All the same, it was ridiculous to imagine the mulatto had frightened him. The old

fellow was clever and no doubt claimed to be a magician in the bush, but Harry was not the man to be cheated by his tricks. After a time, Marston gave it up and went on deck.

Columbine leaned over to the steady breeze. The sea was flecked with white and a spray shower leaped about her bows. A foaming wake trailed behind her and Marston's heart got light as he heard the shrouds hum and felt her measured swing. He liked the sense of speed and buoyancy, the feeling that he had control of straining wood and sail. To fight the sudden wild Northers and keep her off reefs and shoals was a man's job, but it was a job he knew. He did not know the other that Mabel had given him, and often felt puzzled. Yet he had undertaken it and meant to make good. By-and-by he went down to the cabin and to bed.

After a quick run he reached port, transacted some business, shipped his cargo home by steamer, and then returned to the lagoon, where he found Wyndham had another load ready. On the night after his arrival they sat in the cabin, talking, and although Wyndham said nothing about the mulatto he was frank. Indeed, Marston smiled when he remembered the doubts with which he had left his comrade. All the same, he thought he noted something about Harry he had not known before.

"You will sail again as soon as we can load the cargo, but for another port," Wyndham said. "We have, so to speak, found a treasure house and want to keep it dark. If other folks get to know, the treasure will soon be picked up. Anybody can buy a pretty good chart of the coast for a few shillings, and we have

been lucky so far, largely because the shoals keep steamers out."

"The thing will be known sometime," Marston remarked.

"Of course, but I hope to get the most part of the stuff that's worth getting before our rivals come in."

"After that you'll let this branch of the business go?"

"I think not," Wyndham replied. "If I can find a good agent, we ought to hold our ground in the regular trade, although the profits will not be large."

"But you, yourself, don't mean to stay very long?"

"No," said Wyndham. "When I get the best of the produce that seems to have been piling up and appoint our agent, I'll willingly clear out; but I don't expect to do so for three or four months. I've got my chance now and must seize it."

"Three months is a long time to stay at the lagoon. Besides, who will look after the business at home?"

"My manager is pretty capable, though he's young and recently promoted. Would you like to go?"

Marston laughed. "I'm not a business man. Would you trust me?"

"I don't think it would be rash. You're a careful fellow, Bob, and it begins to look as if you had talents you didn't know. You have transacted our business like a shipping clerk."

For a moment or two Marston hesitated. Wyndham looked amused and Bob admitted that the situation had a touch of humor. He meant to stay at a place for which he had a strange, superstitious dislike,

in order to help his comrade, who would sooner be left alone.

"I may go by-and-by, but I won't go yet," he replied.

They let the matter drop and in the morning Wyndham went up the creek in the boat. He stated, rather vaguely, that he must arrange about some cargo and it was three or four days before he returned. Then Marston sailed with another load for a different port, and the French creole who shipped the goods to England was frankly surprised by their value. Indeed, his remarks indicated that the freight was worth much more than Marston had thought. The latter returned to the lagoon, satisfied in one way, but disturbed in another, and did not see much of his comrade.

Wyndham often left the vessel, and although he did not tell Marston where he went, the loaded canoes that came down the creek hinted that he was usefully engaged. It was plain that the business was remarkably profitable, but Marston imagined Wyndham was overdoing the thing. He began to look worn and was sometimes moody, for a white man cannot strain brain and body hard in the tropic swamps.

Marston got uneasy about him, but to some extent sympathized. They could not long enjoy their monopoly, rivals would soon be attracted to the lagoon, and Harry was justified in seizing his chance. He had not thought Harry greedy, but there was much at stake; Chisholm's approval, Harry's business standing, and his marriage to Flora. Marston could understand his comrade's running heavy risks for a girl like that.

Still he was bothered because he did not know all the risks; it was possible that Harry was being driven far by his very natural ambition, but there were lengths to which one ought not to go.

Another thing puzzled Marston. Don Felix had known the negroes and had, moreover, negro blood in his veins, but the trade had not extended until he was dead. It was strange the efforts of a white man and a stranger had led to the sudden extension. Harry had obviously qualities and knowledge that had not marked the other. But what were the qualities, and what did he know? Although Marston sometimes brooded over this, he saw no light.

One evening he sat in the cabin and studied their trading accounts while Wyndham smoked. It was very hot and Marston's face and hands were wet with sweat and his eyes were dazzled. Flies hovered about the light and now and then a beetle struck the mosquito gauze in the skylight. Presently Marston put down his pen and frowned.

"My brain's dull to-night," he said. "I ought to be satisfied with the results of our venture, but there are things I don't see quite plain. For example, we have got a lot of stuff for which we don't seem to have paid."

"You are supercargo," Wyndham rejoined. "The accounts are yours and they're remarkably accurate. All we have got is properly charged against us."

"That is so; I have used your figures. All the same, we haven't handed over much money."

"The business is largely done by barter."

"Of course," said Marston, with a touch of im-

patience. "We haven't delivered much goods against the account."

"The goods will be delivered. Our customers haven't yet stated the articles they want."

"This means they trust us until we can bring the stuff from England or America? In fact, they're willing to trust us for some time?"

"It looks like that," said Wyndham and laughed. "Are you puzzled about it, Bob? After all, Wyndhams' has long traded here and the house's reputation is obviously pretty good."

"But I understand your agents never got such stuff as we have got."

"They were agents and we are principals; I expect that accounts for something," Wyndham replied with a twinkle. "Besides, Wyndhams' never had a supercargo like you."

Marston frowned and tried to think of some other matters that had excited his curiosity, but could not make the effort, and Wyndham put a bottle and glasses on the table.

"Shut the books and I'll mix a cocktail," he said. "You're working too hard and it's very hot."

They went to bed soon afterwards and when he awoke Marston's head ached and he did not get up. He thought he had a dose of fever and felt strangely annoyed. Somehow he had not expected to get fever; he had thought Harry might get it, and to be kept in his bunk was a complication he had not reckoned on. Although Wyndham dosed him as the medical book directed, the fever did not abate. For some days he tossed about in his narrow bunk with a throbbing head

and pain in his limbs, and then lay half-conscious in limp exhaustion. He had strange dreams and long remembered ones; indeed, he sometimes doubted if it were all a dream.

He imagined he was back at the factory on the African river and Wyndham's uncle, the man who vanished, was in the big mildewed room. Marston saw him come out of his door and stand for a moment listening, with his face touched by the moonlight; and then run forward and stop by the body on the boards. The dream was horribly vivid and real, but the big room got hazy and melted, as it were, into *Columbine's* cabin.

Marston saw the lamp, turned low, hang at an angle to the beams, and the charts and cargo books in the net rack. He smelt the mud and heard the ripples splash against the schooner's side. Somebody sat in front of the table and when the man looked up he saw it was Rupert Wyndham. Marston knew him because he had seen his portrait, but his hair had gone white and his skin very dark. In fact, he did not look like a white man. He got up and his face and bent figure melted as the room at the factory had melted, but very slowly got distinct again and Marston thrilled with repulsion and horror. Rupert Wyndham had changed to the old mulatto.

His naked feet made no noise as he crossed the floor and Marston struggled to get up but could not. His lips refused to move when he tried to call for help; the old fellow had fixed his bloodshot eyes on him and he felt powerless. The mulatto stopped by his bunk, holding out a glass, and Marston knew he meant to poison him. He resolved he would not drink,

but felt he must. There was something in the fellow's steady look that broke his resistance and for a few moments he fought a horrible battle against a strange conquering force. Then he took the glass and drained it, and the mulatto melted away. He did not vanish. This implied suddenness; he faded out of the cabin by imperceptible degrees.

Marston knew no more and awoke in daylight, haunted by the dream. He was surprised to feel he was not worse; indeed, his head did not ache and although he was very weak the pain in his limbs had gone. His throat was parched and there was a strange taste in his mouth, as if he had swallowed the draught he dreamed about. Wyndham sat on the locker and got up when he saw Marston was awake.

"You look different. I think you have seen the worst," he said. "I've been bothered about you, Bob."

Marston smiled. He did not want to talk and the relief he saw in his comrade's face was soothing. He went to sleep again and it was dark when he awoke. He did not dream that night and in a few days got, rather shakily, out of his bunk. Wyndham put some cushions for him on the locker and they began to talk.

"The boat's full to the hatches and we go to sea to-morrow," Wyndham said. "If the wind keeps fair, I expect to put you on board the Spanish liner for the Canaries in three or four days. You'll transfer to a homeward Cape boat when you arrive."

"But I don't want to go home yet," Marston objected.

"You are going all the same," Wyndham declared.

"You have been very ill and a sick man hasn't much chance in this miasmatic air. There's no use in arguing; you have got to go."

Marston grumbled, but they sailed with the next high tide, and when they made the port where the Spanish steamer lay he let Wyndham help him on board.

PART II

WYNDHAM CLAIMS HIS REWARD

CHAPTER I

MABEL PONDERS

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon and Marston sat by a window in an English country house. His pose was limp and his face was thin, for the fever had shaken him, but he felt his strength coming back. Outside, bare trees shook their branches in a fresh west wind, and a white belt of surf crept across the shining sands in the broad estuary. On the other side, the Welsh hills rose against the sunset in a smooth black line.

Marston felt pleasantly languid and altogether satisfied. Mabel had put a cushion under his head and given him a footstool. It was soothing to be taken care of by one whom one loved, and after the glare of the Caribbean and the gloom of the swamps, the soft colors and changing lights of the English landscape rested his eyes. For all that, they did not wander long from Mabel, who sat close by, quietly pondering. With her yellow hair and delicate pink skin she looked very English, and all that was English had an extra charm for Marston. He liked her thoughtful calm. Mabel was normal; she, so to speak, walked in the light, and the extravagant imaginings he had indulged at the lagoon vanished when she was about.

Yet he had been forced to remember much, for Chisholm and Flora had come to hear his story, and

he had felt he must make them understand in order to do his comrade justice. Flora's grateful glance and the sparkle in Chisholm's eyes hinted that he had not altogether failed.

"It's a moving tale; I felt I was young again," Chisholm remarked when Marston stopped. "A daring voyage for a craft as old as *Columbine* and Harry obviously handled her well. Some folks declare we're decadent, but my notion is, a race that loves the sea can't lose its vigor, and the spirit that sent out the old adventurers is living yet. Well, I wish I had been with you!" He paused with an apologetic smile and turned to Flora. "It's plain that Harry has qualities."

"He has a good partner," Flora replied and gave Marston a friendly nod. "I mean that, Bob."

"The persistence of the family type is a curious thing," Chisholm resumed. "In old times, Wyndhams' sent out slavers and privateers, and although Harry's modern, he's taking the path his ancestors trod. Well, in a sense, he's lucky, because he can make seafaring pay. The rest of us must indulge it tamely on board a yacht and, however you economize, yachting costs you much."

"Harry has a talent for making his occupations pay," Marston agreed and noted that Flora knitted her brows.

"You are romantic, father," she said. "I don't think Harry is taking his ancestors' path. They were hard and reckless men and traded in flesh and blood. You trade in rubber and dyewoods, don't you, Bob?"

"For the most part. However, we get a bit of everything; ambergris, pearls, and curious drugs."

"I like pearls," Flora remarked, but stopped rather

abruptly and Mabel gave Marston a quick glance. He thought he saw what she meant; he must not talk about pearls just then.

After a time Flora said they must go, and went out with Mabel, but Chisholm stopped by Marston's chair.

"It looks as if you were quite satisfied about this venture of Wyndham's, Bob," he said.

"Why, yes," Marston replied. "I've backed my approval by investing a good sum."

Chisholm was quiet for a moment or two, and then resumed: "That is not altogether what I meant; in fact, it's hard to state frankly what I do mean. I like Harry Wyndham. He's clever, resolute, and a good sportsman, but when he wanted to marry Flora I hesitated. Well, your story has given me some comfort. You have been with Wyndham and are satisfied. One can trust you."

"You are very kind, sir," Marston answered with a touch of awkwardness. "The business is risky, the climate's bad, and one must use some control. Leave liquor alone, for example; I think you understand! Still Harry's rather a Spartan; there's an ascetic vein in him. Besides, he won't stay long. As soon as he has put things straight he's coming back."

"Thank you," said Chisholm, but when he went off Marston felt embarrassed.

Chisholm trusted him and he was not sure he had been altogether frank. Wyndham, of course, was free from certain gross temptations to which some white men in the tropics were victims; but there were others, subtle and insidious, that rather appealed to the brain than the body. Marston could not declare that Harry resisted these. Yet it was impossible he should tell

Chisholm his vague but disturbing doubts. It was some relief when Mabel returned and sat down opposite.

"Have they tired you, Bob?" she asked. "Light a cigarette and don't talk unless you want."

"I want to talk," said Marston, who used no reserve with her.

"Very well. To begin with, you saw my hint when Flora talked about the pearls."

Marston laughed. "After all, I'm not so dull as some people think. You didn't want Flora to know I had brought you pearls?"

"Something like that. Why did Harry send her none?"

"It's rather puzzling," Marston replied thoughtfully. "I suggested I should take a few to Flora, but he said they were not good enough. They're not really first-class pearls, you know. Then he said they might be unlucky. The strange thing is, I think he meant it."

"Yet you brought some for me? You're honest, but you don't always use much tact, dear Bob!"

"Oh, well. We're not superstitious and I'd no grounds for thinking the pearls would bring bad luck."

"It looks as if your partner had some grounds."

"Yes," said Marston. "I don't understand the thing. For that matter, I was puzzled about other things now and then, and although I wanted to get back to you I felt shabby about coming home. Somehow I had a notion I ought to stay. After all, you let me go and would like me to finish my job."

"You're rather a dear and very staunch," Mabel

remarked with a gentle smile. "Anyhow, you were ill and had done enough."

She was quiet for a time and Marston was satisfied to smoke and study her. It had got dark, but the fire was bright and touched her face while she sat still, as if lost in concentrated thought. Marston thought her beautiful and she had beauty, but her beauty was not her strongest charm.

"Bob," she remarked presently, "yours was a curious dream."

"I had fever, you know, but the thing was remarkably real. It was like lantern pictures melting on the screen. Background and figures were accurate and lifelike. In the last scene, I knew I was in *Columbine's* cabin and can hardly persuade myself I was quite asleep. The tide splashed about the boat; I could smell the mud."

"Yet you saw Wyndham's uncle change into the horrible old mulatto."

Marston nodded. "He faded and got distinct again, different, but not different altogether. This was the puzzling thing. However, the story the agent told us about the Leopards had haunted me and I'd often thought about Rupert Wyndham. Perhaps it was because I saw his portrait and he was like my partner."

"You mean he was like him physically?"

"That's not all. Of course a portrait doesn't tell one very much, but I thought Harry had Rupert's temperament."

"I see," said Mabel, knitting her straight brows. "To begin with, do you know Rupert Wyndham's temperament?"

"In a way; Harry and Ellams, the agent, talked about him much. He was a daring man; I think reckless is the proper word. We sober folks have our code, we must do this and not the other; men like Rupert Wyndham have none. If a thing looked worth getting, he'd venture much and break rules for it. Harry, you know, is like that; I mean he'd venture much. Well, I think Rupert made some rash experiments in Africa. He studied the negroes' habits and tried to get their point of view."

"With an object, you suggest? What did he want?"

"Harry imagined it was power."

"Ah," said Mabel. "Harry wants Flora. And he has Rupert's recklessness!"

Marston made a sign of disagreement. "There's a difference. A man might do much for power; but for a girl like Flora he must be fastidious. It wouldn't help if he got money and lost her respect. Harry knows this. He's not a fool."

"But suppose Flora didn't know how he got his money?"

"Harry doesn't cheat. He wouldn't use means she disapproved and then claim his reward."

"Oh, well," said Mabel, "I think we'll let it go. I like you to trust your friends."

Soon afterwards a car came to the steps and Mabel saw that Marston put on a warm scarf and fastened his collar before he drove off. Then she went back to the fire and pondered his story and subsequent remarks. The story was strange, but she thought she saw a light where all was dark to Bob. She had long suspected that Wyndham was reckless and would not be bound

by rules if the prize he sought made his breaking them worth while. Moreover, she had got books about West Africa and the Caribbean that touched on Fetish and Voodoo superstitions. Perhaps she was romantic, but it was possible Wyndham, led by strong temptation, had ventured where a white man ought not to go. With an effort, Mabel banished her doubts. After all, the thing was unthinkable. Bob had not been cheated; he knew Harry.

In the morning, Marston occupied himself with some old books in Wyndhams' office at the top of a big stone building. The office was comfortably furnished and there was a good picture of an old-fashioned sailing ship on the wall; the big single-top sails indicated when she was built. At the end of the street the window commanded, the masts and funnels of channel steamers rose above a warehouse where Wyndhams' barks and brigs had loaded goods they bartered for slaves. Marston glanced at the modern iron masts and smiled when he looked up, for the book he studied had nothing to do with business.

It was the log of the slaver *Providence* that Wyndham had talked about, and it related how they towed her with the boats when the negroes died in the suffocating hold. There was something about a sacrifice that did not bring the needed wind and its cost was charged against the freight. They were hard men, touched by strange superstitions, who towed the *Providence,* but their brutality was businesslike. Marston found an entry for the negroes used up at the oars, with their value at Jamaica properly noted.

After a time, he shut the log-book. He had read enough and resolved there would be a break in some

of Wyndhams' traditions now he was a partner in the house. He had noted things he did not like, and Harry would support his new plans when he came home. By and by he heard steps in the clerks' office and a broker was announced. The latter came in and put a small brown jar on the table.

"I told your people we wanted some hard oil and they sent us samples," he said. "If the bulk's quite up to specimen, I think it ought to meet the bill. We must have prime quality for the particular job."

Marston picked up the jar, which held a quantity of thick yellow grease. It was palm oil and its strong but rather pleasant smell awoke vivid memories. He saw the whitewashed factory shine beside the muddy river and a gang of naked negroes filling big barrels in a compound tunneled by land-crabs' holes. The compound glowed with light against a background of forest wrapped in unchanging gloom, from which the palm oil came. For all that, the oil was a well-known article of commerce. There was nothing mysterious about its production and Marston would have been satisfied had Wyndhams' confined its trade to stuff like this. Then he saw the broker was waiting.

"Don't samples generally stand for the bulk?" he asked.

The broker looked at him rather sharply and smiled.

"It depends upon the people with whom you deal and the skill of their warehouseman. A man who knows his job can draw samples that will pass a good-middling lot as prime, and this without the buyer's being able to claim that they're not fairly representative. But of course, you know ——"

"I don't know. You see, I'm a beginner," Marston replied, and examined a ticket stuck in the oil. "Well, I saw this lot barreled in Africa. The quality is *not* prime."

The broker looked surprised and annoyed. "Then your manager has made things rather awkward for us. One uses some judgment about samples, but our customer must have a first-class article and we engaged to supply him at a stated price. I'll own that the price was a little below what others asked. We quoted on your offer."

"Our offer stands," said Marston, who indicated the jar. "Will you be satisfied if the oil we send is all like this?"

"We will be quite satisfied."

"Very well. Send in the order and you'll get the quality you want."

The broker lighted a cigarette and gave Marston his case. "I like the way you do business. We are buying for big people, the trade's steady and good, but we haven't dealt much with Wyndhams' before. If this lot's all right, other orders will follow."

"You can take it for granted the lot will be all right," Marston replied.

He frowned when the broker went out. It looked as if Wyndhams' goods had not always been up to sample and Marston remembered hints he heard about the character of the house. Harry, however had not long had control and had, perhaps, left things to his clerks. It was going to be different now.

Presently Marston got up and went to the general office where he interviewed the young manager. He

did not say much, but he was very firm and when he returned to his room the other shrugged.

"If the new partner takes this line, your next balance sheet won't be good." he remarked to the book-keeper.

CHAPTER II

MABEL'S PEARLS

FOUR months after Marston reached England, Wyndham came home. He had got thin and, when he was quiet, looked worn, but he had returned in triumph and soon persuaded Marston that his efforts had earned a rich reward. Things had gone better than his letters indicated.

On the evening of his arrival, he waited in Flora's drawing-room for Chisholm, who had not yet got back from his office at the port. Electric lights burned above the mantel and Wyndham sat by the cheerful fire, with Flora in a low chair opposite. For a time she had listened while he talked, and now her eyes rested on him with keen but tranquil satisfaction. Harry had come back, as she had known he would come, like a conqueror. She was proud that he had justified her trust, and although it had been hard to let him go, this did not matter.

She was ashamed of her hesitation when he first declared himself her lover, but the suspicion that she was rash had not lasted long. Flora was loyal and when she had accepted him looked steadily forward. It was not her habit to doubt and look back. One thing rather disturbed her; Harry was obviously tired. Before he went away his talk and laugh were marked by a curious sparkle that Flora thought like the sparkle of wine. This had gone, but, in a way, she liked him better, although his sober mood was new.

By-and-by he glanced about the room, which was rather plainly furnished, but with a hint of artistic taste. Chisholm was not rich and the taste was Flora's. Then he moved his chair and leaned forward to the fire with a languid smile.

"Our English cold is bracing, but it bites keen when one has known the tropics," he said. "I like light and warmth."

"You got both on the Caribbean," Flora remarked.

"No," said Wyndham, "not much light. For a few hours, the glare was dazzling, but soon the shadow crept back from the bush and the fever-mist floated about the boat. On the creek and at the village, you got a sense of gloom that never melted." He paused and added with a smile: "It's often like that in the tropics, and the gloom is not altogether physical."

Flora noted the thinness of his face and his pallor. Her glance got soft and pitiful.

"My dear!" she said. "I wanted you to win; not that I cared for your winning, but because I wanted you to satisfy others who do not know you so well."

"Your father, for example?" he rejoined with a twinkle. "Well, he took the proper line, but I think I have some arguments that will persuade him."

"I sent you," she said, with a touch of color. "Afterwards I saw that I was shabby and vain. I ought not to have let you go. What did it matter about the others, when I was satisfied? You have won and they will own this, but I'm afraid it has cost you much."

Wyndham gave her a rather sharp glance and then smiled. "One must pay for what one gets, but, if it's much comfort, I was very willing."

"You were always generous, but I'm afraid you're sometimes rash."

"The rashness was justified. If I had to choose again, I'd stake my all, fortune, mind, and body, and think the risk worth while."

"You're very nice," said Flora, and added with a blush: "But, in one way, there was no risk. Even if you had been beaten, I would have persuaded father. It was rather for his sake you went than mine and that's why I'm half ashamed. But he deserved something; he has long indulged me."

She got up. There were steps in the passage, and Chisholm came in. Wyndham stayed for dinner and afterwards went with Chisholm to his smoking-room and gave him a document.

"My book-keeper drafted the statement, because I thought you ought to know where I stand," he said. "The sum indicated could be invested for Flora. Not much of a marriage settlement of course, but perhaps it will help to banish your very natural doubts."

Chisholm studied the paper with some surprise. "You have done much better than I thought; I don't know if this is flattering or not. In fact, when one remembers that you have not long been head of the house, your success is rather remarkable."

"I ran some risks," said Wyndham, smiling. "We have got started; perhaps I'm optimistic, but I came home persuaded we are going on. It's possible we may go far."

"You have a good partner," Chisholm remarked.

"The best!" Wyndham agreed quietly.

Chisholm liked his hint of feeling, but hesitated, although there was no obvious reason for this. He

liked Wyndham, and the latter was on the way to mend his fortune. All the same, he shrank, rather illogically, from giving his formal consent to the wedding.

"Well," he said, with something of an effort, "I'm glad your affairs are going as well as you hoped and I suppose you now expect me to keep my promise. I've no grounds to refuse and you can marry Flora when she is ready."

Wyndham went soon afterwards and Chisholm said to Flora, "You declared Harry would force me to approve and he has done so."

"What do you approve?" Flora asked, smiling.

"Oh, well," said Chisholm, "I think I see what you suggest. Looks as if I must be frank. Since my duty is to take care of you, it's a big relief to find Harry is a good business man and is going to make Wyndhams' prosperous. I like to feel he's able to give you all you ought to have."

Flora's glance was proud. "I want you to be satisfied, and it was for this I let Harry go. I would not have hesitated had he come back disappointed and poor. Now I feel half cheated, because, in one way, he doesn't need my help."

"You are a plucky girl," said Chisholm. "Still I expect it's better he has come back rich. After all, romance wears off, and then, if money's short, the strain begins."

"Your philosophy's not very good," Flora rejoined with a laugh. "Real romance never wears off; the strain's the test that marks the difference between the true and false. However, since you have carried out

your duty and used a caution that's rather new, you ought to be happy."

She kissed him and he let her go, but he was thoughtful afterwards. He felt he ought to be happy, but somehow he was not. By-and-by he got up and went to meet Mabel and Marston, whom he heard come in. A famous Shakespearian actor was visiting the town and Marston had called to suggest that they should see the play together. They fixed a night, without knowing in which of his favorite parts the tragedian would appear. Mabel said this was not important, because he was good in all.

When the car stopped at the theater she went with Flora to the cloak-room and began to take off her furs in front of a long glass. As she did so she hesitated, because she remembered something she ought to have remembered before. It was too late now, for as the cloak slipped off her shoulders a string of small pearls caught the light. Flora had not long since said she liked pearls. Then Mabel saw that Flora had seen the pearls, and thought she had noted her hesitation, because she smiled.

"They are very pretty," Flora remarked. "I suppose Bob gave them to you?"

"They are small," said Mabel deprecatingly, but not because she did not value her lover's present. "Bob said something about their not getting any Harry thought good enough to send home."

"Bob and you are very nice, but you're sometimes obvious," Flora rejoined. "However, I'm not jealous, and if the pearls are small, they stand for much."

"These stand for endurance and bold adventure. I think Bob did not get them easily."

"That would not matter to Bob," said Flora. "But I wonder what they cost the others, the dark-skinned men who found them on the sands beneath the Caribbean. Pearls, you know, sometimes stand for tears." She moved from the glass, for the room was filling, and smiled as she resumed: "I don't know why I indulge a morbid sentiment when I'm happy. You will never have much grounds to cry for Bob."

They went down a passage and found their places in the stalls. The house was full and Marston had engaged such seats as he could get. Wyndham, Flora and Chisholm were in front; Mabel and Marston in the row behind.

"*Macbeth!*" he said as he gave Mabel a program. "Rather curious; but I like the play. Kind of plot one can understand."

"Why is it curious?" Mabel asked. "Don't you understand them all?"

"Not like this," said Marston, with a touch of awkwardness. "The motto — or d'you call it the motive? — is plain from the start. 'Ambition that over-leaps itself,' if I'm quoting right."

Mabel said nothing. Bob was not clever, but he was sometimes shrewd and she saw what was in his mind. This was easier because he looked uncomfortable. The poor fellow felt he had not been quite loyal to his friend. Then Mabel frowned. Perhaps Bob had seen clearly; there *was* a parallel.

The lights went out and when the curtain rose Marston tried to banish his disturbing thoughts and enjoy the play. He had seen it often, but the story

gripped him with a force he had not felt before. All was well done. Pale flames played round the witches' cauldron, and there was something strangely suggestive about the bent figures that hovered about the fire and faded in the gloom. He had sometimes thought the witch-scene unnecessary, but now he felt its significance. In Shakespeare's days, men believed in witchcraft, and when one had been in Africa one owned there were powers that ruled the dark. Bob was quiet and listened, with his mouth firmly set.

A line caught his notice: "Her husband's to Aleppo gone, the master of the Tiger." Marston had not thought much about this before, but he saw the strange, high-pooped old vessel, manned by merchant adventurers, plunge across the surges of the Levant. She was a type; there were always merchant adventurers, and he pictured *Columbine* rolling on the African surf.

Then for a time he let the play absorb him. The witches were tempting Macbeth, flattering his ambition, promising him power. The gloom and the flickering light round the cauldron recalled Africa; Marston had seen the naked factory boys crouch beside their fires, tapping little drums, and singing strange, monotonous songs that sounded like incantations. He thought about Rupert Wyndham; witches were numerous in Africa and Marston wondered what they had promised him. Was it power? Or knowledge the cautious white man shuns? Marston glanced at Wyndham, in front. He had not spoken since the curtain rose and the pose of his head indicated that his eyes were fixed on the stage. He was very still

and Marston thought the drama had seized his imagination.

The cauldron fire leaped up, throwing red reflections that touched a figure moving in the gloom. Marston wondered whether his eyes were dazzled, for the hooded figure began to look like the Bat. Then there was a flash, the witches vanished, and he felt a strange relief when the curtain fell and the lights went up.

"Very well done! A realistic scene!" Wyndham remarked, looking round. "Did you know it was *Macbeth*, Bob?"

"I did not," said Marston. "If I had known, I think I'd have picked another night."

Wyndham looked hard at him, and then laughed and began to talk to Flora, but Marston felt jarred. Harry laughed like that in moments of tension when others swore. Then he saw that Mabel was studying him.

"You are quiet, Bob," she said.

"It's long since I saw a good play," Marston replied. "My first relaxation since I got to work, and I expect it grips me harder because it's fresh. Full house, isn't it? Do you know many people?"

"I see one or two friends of yours. They have been looking at you, but you wouldn't turn."

"I didn't see them," said Marston. "I've got the habit of dropping people since I joined Wyndhams'. Regular work is something of a novelty and while the newness lasts you get absorbed. I don't know if it's good or not. What do you think?"

Mabel laughed. "Well done, Bob! It cost you something, but you felt you ought to talk."

"It oughtn't to have cost me anything," said Marston apologetically. "But how did you know?"

"My dear, you're honest and obvious. Besides, we do know things, by instinct perhaps. I would always know when you were disturbed."

"I'm not disturbed. You are here."

"Ah," said Mabel, "now you're very nice! But let's be frank. You were thinking about another drama, in real life, that touches you close. I see one comfort; there's no Lady Macbeth in the piece."

Marston agreed and mused. The light was good, and touched Mabel's face and neck where the small pearls shone. He saw Flora's face in profile, her shoulders, and the flowing curve of her arm. He liked the fine poise of her head. She looked proud and somehow vivid; one got a hint of her fearless, impulsive character. Her hair and eyes were brown and she wore a corn-yellow dress. Mabel's skin was white and red, and her dull-blue clothes matched the color of her eyes. She was calm, steadfast, and sometimes reserved, a contrast to Flora, although in ways they were alike. Both were honest and hated what was mean. Marston felt comforted. There was no Lady Macbeth in the piece.

Moreover, a glance along the rows of people was calming. There were business men with shining, bald heads, and some younger whose clothes were cut in the latest mode. Women of different ages, for the most part fashionably dressed, sat among the others, but all wore the conventional English stamp. There was nothing extravagant about them; Marston thought they sat contentedly by modern hearths. They were not the people to follow wandering fires. Perhaps he

was something of a romantic fool; but when one had been in Africa and the swamps beside the Caribbean —

The play went on. He saw Macbeth's ambitions realized. The witches' promises were fulfilled, but with fulfillment came retribution that had looked impossible. This was the touch that fixed Marston's thought. Macbeth was cheated, but he must pay; the powers of evil lied. One wondered whether it was always like that.

When the curtain fell and the lights went up shortly before the end, Marston remarked: "After all there were the witches. Lady Macbeth was, so to speak, unnecessary."

Mabel had indulged him before; indeed, his mood had chimed with hers, but she thought he had followed this line far enough. His illness had left a mark, and he sometimes brooded. She laughed when Flora turned.

"Bob's getting to be a dramatic critic and something of a philosopher," she said. "Perhaps he'll tell you how he would improve the play."

"You know what I mean," Marston replied good-humoredly. "Aren't a man's greed and ambition enough to drive him on, without an outside tempter?"

"Without a bad woman to urge him?" Flora suggested.

"When one comes to think of it, a good woman might be as dangerous as the other," said Marston.

Mabel frowned. She saw where her lover's remark led, but doubted if the others did. She forced a laugh when Wyndham looked round.

"Bob has a flash of imagination now and then," she said.

"I expect Bob would sooner leave out the witches, now he knows something about Ghost Leopards and Voodoo," Wyndham replied. "Anyhow, I think the mummery round the cauldron rather crude; the act was, no doubt, written to meet the spirit of the times. Temptation by repulsive hags would not appeal to an up-to-date young man. My notion of a tempter is an urbanely ironical Mephistopheles."

Marston said nothing. He remembered the Bat's strange, mocking grin; and then roused himself and laughed. He was getting morbid; the wretched fever had shaken him. He joked with Flora until the curtain rose and when it came down on the closing scene resolved to forget the play.

"I've ordered supper. It will brace us up," he said.

They went to a crowded restaurant, and Marston liked the tinkle of glass, voices, and cheerful laughter, but he shivered when they left the glittering room and got into the car.

"Put the rug round you before we start," said Mabel.

"I think I will," Marston replied, apologetically. "I feel as if my temperature was up; malaria has an annoying trick of coming back. When it does come back, you get moody and pessimistic. Sorry if I bored you to-night!"

"Perhaps it was malaria, but I wasn't bored," said Mabel, with an indulgent smile.

CHAPTER III

PETERS' OFFER

WYNDHAM and Flora were married at a small country church. The morning was bright and the sun touched the east window with vivid color and pierced the narrow lancets on the south. Red and green reflections stained the mosaics inside the chancel rails, but shadows lurked behind the arches and pillars, for the old building had no clerestory.

Mabel was bridesmaid, Marston was groomsman, and as he waited for a few moments by the rails he looked about. Commodore Chisholm had numerous friends, and for the most part Marston knew the faces turned towards the chancel. He had sailed hard races against some of the men and danced with their wives and daughters. They were sober English folk, and he was glad they had come to stamp with their approval his partner's wedding. Some, however, he could not see, because they sat back in the gloom.

Then he glanced at his companions. He was nervous, but Mabel was marked by her serene calm. Flora's look was rather fixed, and although she had not much color, her pose was resolute and proud. Marston wondered whether she felt she was making something of a plunge; but if she did so, he knew she would not hesitate. Chisholm's face was quiet and perhaps a trifle stern; he looked rather old, and Marston imagined him resigned. The Commodore was frank; one generally knew what he felt. All three

looked typically English, but Wyndham did not. Although his eyes were very blue and his hair was touched by red, he was different from the others. His face, as Marston saw it in profile, was thin and in a way ascetic, but it wore a stamp of recklessness. His pose was strangely alert and highly strung. There was something exotic about him.

The vicar began the office and Marston remarked with a sense of annoyance that the church got dark, as if the sun had gone behind a cloud. He was not superstitious, but he had had enough of gloom, and the fever had left him with a touch of melancholy. He glanced at Mabel and felt soothed. Her face was quiet and reverent; she was unostentatiously religious and her calm confidence banished his doubts. After a few minutes, the light got stronger, and yielding to a strange impulse, he looked round. A sunbeam shone through a south window and picked out a face he knew. Marston moved abruptly and came near forgetting how he was engaged.

The face stood out, yellow and withered, against the surrounding shadow. The eyes were fixed on the wedding group and Marston thought their look ironical, but the bright beam faded and he wondered whether he had been deceived. It was hard to believe that Peters, whom he had last seen at the lagoon, was in the church, and Marston hoped he was not. Peters belonged to the fever-haunted forest; he brought back the gloom and sense of mystery Bob wanted to forget. There was something strangely inappropriate about his coming to Harry's wedding.

Wyndham turned his head, although the movement hardly seemed enough to enable him to look across the

church. Marston, however, roused himself, for he had followed the office, and slipped the ring into his comrade's hand. Wyndham put it on the book, and then as the vicar gave it back, let it drop. There was a tinkle as it struck the tiles and, for a moment, an awkward pause. Flora started and Chisholm frowned, but Marston picked up the ring and when Wyndham put it on Flora's hand, tried to feel he had not got a jar. Perhaps he was ridiculous, but he wished Peters had stayed away and Harry had not dropped the ring.

There was no further mishap, the sun shone out again and as its beams drove back the shadows the gilded cross above the screen caught the light and flashed. Mabel looked up. Marston thought her unconscious movement directed his glance, and he was moved to tenderness and calm. After the feeling of repugnance Peters had excited, the thing was strangely significant and he knew the glittering symbol was Mabel's guiding light.

The vicar stopped. Flora gave Marston her hand in the vestry and he put his on Wyndham's shoulder as he wished them happiness. In a few minutes they went out and when Wyndham's car drove off Marston stood by the gate with Mabel, waiting for theirs. People stood about talking to one another, and Marston tried to hide his annoyance when a man outside the group caught his eye. He had not been deceived; the fellow was Peters, for he smiled.

For a moment Marston hesitated. There was, however, no obvious reason for his refusing to acknowledge Peters, and he nodded when he advanced. The latter's clothes were in the latest fashion; he wore light gloves and very neat varnished shoes. At a little dis-

tance he looked like a prosperous Englishman, but as he came up and took off his hat the sun touched his yellow, deep-lined face and the curious white tufts in his hair. Then he looked pinched and shriveled.

"I hardly thought to see you. Indeed, I imagined I had cheated myself," Marston remarked.

Peters laughed. "Our meeting is, after all, not strange. I landed a few days since and stopped to transact some business before I go on to Hamburg. A paragraph in a newspaper caught my eye, and, having nothing to do this morning, I thought I'd come to your partner's wedding. Since I really don't know him well I didn't stop him as he came out."

"Will you be long in town?" Marston asked.

"Another day or two," said Peters. "I must try to look you up."

He stepped back as a car started, and Marston saw no more of him. On the whole, he thought he had seen enough and was annoyed because Peters was coming to the office. This, however, was not important and he forgot about it.

In the afternoon Mabel and he walked across a heathy common that sloped to the river mouth. The tide was ebbing and thin white lines of surf curved about the sands. Here and there a wet belt shone with reflections from the sky; the woods and fields on the western shore were getting dim, and a long range of hills rose against the fading light. The soft colors and the hazy distance, where one heard the sea beat on the outer shoals, were restful to Marston's eyes. He loved the quiet English landscape, and glancing at Mabel, half-consciously gave thanks because he was at home.

"Who was the strange little man at the church?" Mabel asked presently.

"Peters," said Marston. "We met him on the Caribbean. Did you think him strange?"

"I didn't study him. His eyes were strange; they seemed restless and very keen. The white tufts in his hair were unusual."

"Fever leaves its stamp when you get it often," Marston remarked. "Besides, I expect the fellow has had some romantic adventures. Anyhow, he's not a friend of ours. We gave him dinner on board because he was a white man. That's all."

"I wonder whether Harry saw him, just before he dropped the ring."

"What do you think?" Marston asked with some curiosity.

"I don't know. Harry looked round."

"Oh, well," said Marston. "If Harry did see him, I don't imagine it had much to do with his dropping the ring."

Mabel gave him a quiet glance. She knew Bob and thought he was trying to persuade himself, not to cheat her.

"Yet you did not like to see the man!"

"I did not," Marston admitted. "He, so to speak, brought things back; our agent's dying and the dreams I had when I was ill. Some people belong to their surroundings. I mean, they stand for the places they come from, and Peters belongs to the mangrove lagoons. You and Flora stand for England; spots like this where all's bracing and calm. I think we'll let Peters go."

"You're very nice," said Mabel, smiling. "If we

are going to flatter each other, you stand for the sea."

"No," said Marston. "The sea's restless, breezy, and sparkling, and I'm not. You have got a rather dull fellow for a lover."

"Ah," said Mabel quietly, "you are my lover, Bob, and that means much."

She mused while they crossed the heath in the fading light. Bob was not what he called breezy and he did not sparkle, but she would not have him other than he was. She had not often seen him angry, but she knew he could be strongly moved and forces then set in motion were not easily stopped. Bob was steadfast; this was, perhaps, the proper word. He had a reserve of strength and tenacity, of which she thought he was not altogether conscious. She had loved him long and it was significant that she loved him better than at the beginning.

By and by he looked at her. "I grudge Harry nothing and have much for which I'm thankful. All the same, I envied him his luck to-day."

"Poor old Bob!" said Mabel. "But you know, when I promised ——"

He nodded. "I know and of course I'm satisfied. I can't urge you; but sometimes, like to-day, waiting's hard."

Mabel's eyes were very soft. There was love in her glance, but he got a hint of tears.

"My dear," she said, "I think you will not be forced to wait very long." She paused and tried to smile as she resumed: "Never mind, Bob; you needn't talk! I know your sympathy."

He said nothing, but took her hand, and she felt comforted. Mrs. Hilliard was a widow and had long

been ill, and Bob had known Mabel would not marry while her mother needed her. At the beginning, he had urged that he was able to take care of both, and since he was rich things might be made easier for the invalid if she lived with them. Mabel, however, was firm, and Bob gave in. He would not argue that her sense of duty was perhaps mistaken and Mrs. Hillard's refusal might be selfish. Mabel's strong persuasion was enough for him.

"You will come in and see her? She has been alone all day," Mabel said, and Marston went.

Mrs. Hilliard sat by the fire in an invalid's chair, and when he entered gave him a friendly smile. She looked very pinched and fragile and he thought Mabel's fears were justified. For an hour he talked about the wedding and other matters as cheerfully as he could, and when he went Mabel kissed him at the gate.

"You are very good, Bob," she said. "I owe you much and some day I'll try to pay my debt."

In the morning Marston went to the office and soon afterwards Peters was shown in. Marston gave him a cigar and they talked about the Caribbean.

"I'm beginning to feel I've had enough," Peters presently remarked. "Life in the swamps is strenuous and one likes quiet when one's no longer young."

"On the surface, things looked pretty dull. I felt languid as soon as I arrived and didn't really wake up until I left."

Peters smiled. "Yet I imagine you found the monotony is sometimes broken. Besides, you didn't stay long enough to learn that much that's curious goes on beneath the surface. There's an under-

world." He paused and added meaningly: "On the whole, I think the term is pretty good."

"I was satisfied with the surface. Anyhow, I didn't try to look beneath," Marston rejoined, with some dryness. "In fact, I'd sooner leave some things alone."

"A prudent resolve, when one can carry it out! But d'you imagine your partner controlled his curiosity?"

Marston feared that Wyndham had not, and frowned, because he felt Peters had meant his remark to be significant. The latter resumed: "Of course, you can live tranquilly at the old Spanish ports; that is, if you are sober and resist the dark-skinned señoritas' charms. Perhaps the worst risk a rash stranger runs is being found in a dark *calle* with a jealous half-breed's knife in his back. In order to get hurt, you must court danger; in the swamps it haunts you. Of course, if you trade in the regular markets, the profit is not large; but if I could get a good post at a port with a casino and cafés, I think I'd be satisfied."

"Haven't your employers a job that would suit to offer you?" Marston asked carelessly.

"They have not. They have been grumbling recently and hinting that I've got slack. As a matter of fact, they have some grounds. My knowledge of the business is pretty extensive, but since your partner came on the scene the goods we want to get have gone to Wyndhams'. I'm now going to Hamburg to account for this, but doubt if I can do so satisfactorily. My explanation's rather romantic than plausible."

"Then, you have an explanation?"

Peters smiled. "Yes. It looks as if the Bat had let his old friends go and taken Wyndham up."

"Ridiculous!" said Marston. "What has the Bat to do with trade? He's not a merchant or a cultivator."

"For all that, the fellow has power. The President rules the cities, the *guardias rurales* the cleared land, but the Bat and the devil rule the bush. I know half-civilized *Mestizos* who believe the Bat is the devil. Anyhow, he's a useful friend."

"He's not my friend," Marston rejoined. "However, if your employers are not satisfied, I don't see how I can help."

"I have a plan," said Peters. "I know the bush, the negroes, and their habits, as few white men know them, and my knowledge is worth much to a merchant house. Well, I'm not greedy and imagine you'd find it worth while to give me a small partnership; or, if you'd sooner, appoint me your agent at a port from which I could control the lagoon trade."

Marston looked at him with some surprise. On the whole, he did not like the fellow and he had no grounds for trusting him.

"I'm afraid I can't agree," he replied. "We have a pretty good agent at all the ports where we trade, and Wyndham sent a man he was satisfied about to the lagoon. Our business is not large enough to justify our taking a new partner."

"The business is extending. Would you like to talk to Wyndham about it?"

"He won't be back for some time, and I expect he'll agree that we don't need help. I think you had better stick to your Hamburg friends."

"Oh, well," said Peters philosophically, "it looks as if I must drop the plan, but if you need me later, you know where I can be found. In the meantime, we'll let it go. When I left, Ramon Larrinaga sent you his compliments. He's getting an important man; had some part in the plot that put the new president in power and has, no doubt, claimed his reward."

"You may give him our congratulations when you go back," Marston replied, and soon afterwards Peters went off.

Marston smoked a cigarette and reviewed his visitor's remarks. The fellow had implied that Wyndham had, by some means, gained the Bat's support, and this jarred. Perhaps it jarred worse because Marston had tried to banish suspicions that chimed with the hint. Then he imagined Peters' offer was rather made to Wyndham than to him. Marston meant to urge his partner to refuse. He did not want to see Peters again, but doubted. The fellow was cunning and obstinate. By-and-by Marston threw away his cigarette and rang for his clerk. He would not bother about Peters until he was forced. In fact, if Peters did not come back, he was not sure he would tell Wyndham about it at all.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST EXPLORERS

THE days were getting longer and although the evening was cold Marston rejoiced that winter had gone. He had worked hard at the office until Wyndham's return from his honeymoon, and now he was glad to get on the water again. Putting down his oars, he let *Red Rose's* dinghy drift, because he doubted if the tide had risen enough to carry him across the sands. A bitter wind blew up the estuary, where belts of shining water wound among the shoals, and some distance astern *Red Rose* rode at her moorings in a sheltered pool. For half a mile, sand and shallow water ran between Marston and the beach.

He had brought the yacht round from a neighboring river mouth where the smoke of a busy port blackened her gear, and had since been occupied on board. Now he was pleasantly tired, hungry, and braced by the cold. He knew no amusement that gave him as much satisfaction as working on board a yacht. In fact, if one went about the thing properly, it was really a scientific job.

The dinghy grounded, and letting her bump across the sand, he lighted his pipe and reviewed his changed life since Wyndham won the Commodore's cup. Things had begun to change then. For the most part, he had worked hard; at first as *Columbine's* mate and supercargo, afterwards as a merchant's clerk. Al-

though he had a invested a good sum, he was really a clerk. Sometimes he stated his views and Wyndham listened politely; but when one came to think about it, Harry did not tell him much. Then he did not altogether understand transactions in which the house engaged.

For all that, Marston was not hurt. He admitted that his judgment was not worth much. He had not, like Harry, been trained for business. In fact, it was something of a relief when Harry came home and he got rid of his responsibility, although he thought he had, on the whole, managed rather well. Recently, he had taken things easier and Wyndham had encouraged him to do so. He suggested Marston's going off for a few days now and then, and told him not to bother about the office while he fitted out *Red Rose*. Harry was a good sort, and since he did not need him, Marston was glad to occupy himself with the yacht.

By-and-by the dinghy floated off the shoal and Marston saw the Welsh hills on the other shore were getting dim and blue. He was cold and drove the little boat briskly across the rippling water. Carrying her up the beach, he went to an inn where he left his yachting clothes and then set out across the heathy common for Mrs. Hilliard's house. Mabel gave him tea by the fire and when it got dark outside they talked in the flickering glow. Flora, Wyndham and Chisholm were coming to dinner, but would not arrive yet, and Marston lounged contentedly in a big easy chair.

"I don't know if I'm tired or lazy," he remarked. "Anyhow, it's very nice to sit by the fire with you."

"When you're lazy?" said Mabel, with a smile.

"Always," Marston declared. "However, you get a particular satisfaction from loafing after you have had a good day."

"On board the yacht? I'm not jealous, Bob, but you haven't been to the office much."

"That is so," Marston admitted. "I was rather keen about the business; in fact, I'm keen yet. I like to know how things are going, even if I can't help; but the boat's a temptation and Harry doesn't need me all the time."

"Do you know how things are going?"

"For the most part," Marston replied, with a touch of embarrassment, because he sometimes felt he did not know as much as he would like. "I don't bother about small particulars."

"Has Harry stated he did not need you? Or did you imagine this, and make it an excuse for a holiday?"

Marston pondered for a moment or two. He did not altogether approve Mabel's line, perhaps because it excited doubts he had tried to banish.

"Harry knows I like pottering about the boat," he said. "He has hinted that I needn't stick to business quite so close now he's in control. After all, there's hardly enough work for two partners."

Mabel let this go. She knew Bob and thought he was rather trying to justify Wyndham than to find an excuse for his own laziness. It looked as if he suspected his partner was willing to get rid of him now and then. Moreover, Bob was not lazy.

"Harry's occupied pretty closely, is he not?" she said. "I have thought he looks tired."

"That is so," agreed Marston, who had recently noted a hint of strain about his comrade. Wyndham was sometimes impatient; his gay carelessness had gone. "After all, managing a business like ours is not an easy job," he resumed. "Things, however, are going well and I imagine I made a sound investment. In fact, we're getting rich."

A car rolled up the drive and Mabel rang for lights. Flora, Wyndham, and Chisholm came in and soon afterwards dinner was served. Mrs. Hilliard did not come down and Mabel, sitting at the top of the table, studied her guests. Flora looked charming; she had since her marriage got a touch of dignity. Mabel thought she was happy, but now and then she gave her husband a quick glance. Wyndham was thin, and although he talked and laughed, when he was quiet the jaded look Mabel had remarked was plain. She knew Bob's mind and his puzzled uneasiness about his partner that he would not own. Chisholm, she thought, was altogether satisfied, and the grounds for his satisfaction were obvious. Wyndhams' was prospering, and his consent to his daughter's marriage was justified. Still, Chisholm did not see very far.

When they got up Mabel gave them coffee by the fire in the hall and told the men to smoke. Chisholm, feeling for his tobacco, pulled a piece of newspaper from his pocket.

"Have you read the news to-day?" he asked Wyndham.

"I have not," Wyndham replied. "One may be able to study newspapers at the office of a navigation board, but my job is not a sinecure. Besides, Bob deserted me, and I'd hardly time for lunch."

"Then, I've something that may interest you. I cut the thing out, in case you missed it. It's headed, 'A tragic story of tropical adventure.'"

Wyndham looked up, rather sharply, and held out his hand for the cutting, but Marston said to Chisholm, "Suppose you read it. Then we'll all hear."

"Very well," said Chisholm, who polished his spectacles and began:

"'Some time since, a small exploring expedition started inland from the Salinas coast of the Caribbean." He stopped and asked: "Isn't that the country you are exploiting?"

"Yes," said Wyndham, with some dryness. "It's not a healthy country for white explorers, unless they're acclimatized. But go on."

"'The party consisted of a commercial botanist, a student of tropical diseases, a mining expert, and a trader stationed on the coast.'"

"Peters!" said Wyndham, looking at Marston. "No doubt, he persuaded the others; I expected the fellow would try to get on our track."

"That's the name," said Chisholm and resumed: "'The party engaged a number of half-breed porters and set off, although they had been warned the bush country was disturbed. The belt of swampy forest was penetrated by the Spaniards four hundred years since, but it is, for the most part, little known by white men, and its *Mestizo* and negro inhabitants dislike strangers.'"

"The newspaper man seems remarkably well informed," Wyndham observed. "I expect he has a correspondent in the neighborhood."

"'When some time had gone and no news of the

explorers reached the coast, the government got alarmed,'" Chisholm went on. "'Señor Larrinaga, the head official for the district, fitted out a rescue expedition and searched the forest. They found one survivor, the trader Peters, exhausted by suffering.'"

"Peters said Ramon Larrinaga was getting an important man," Marston interposed. "Sorry, sir! please don't stop."

"'Peters' story was tragic. The porters had got uneasy soon after the start, but their employers forced them to go on, until one night, when the party stopped at an empty village, they vanished. In the morning, Peters left his companions, with the object of overtaking the porters, but lost their track, and returning in two or three days, found the others dead. They were in a native hut and he saw no indication that violence had been used. Since the party carried their own provisions, it did not look as if they had been poisoned. Señor Larrinaga had some trouble to reach the village. The half-breeds and negroes in the forest belt are turbulent and rebellious and the rescue party was small. He, however, pushed on and when he arrived found the hut had been burned and nobody about. Two of the explorers had previously undertaken the development of rubber and mining concessions for merchants of this city, by whom their mysterious fate is much regretted.'"

Chisholm put down the cutting and the others were silent for a few moments. Wyndham looked disturbed, but lighted a cigarette, rather deliberately.

"Peters ought not to have taken those fellows into the bush. He knew the risk," he said.

"The others probably knew it, since the paper states

they had done such work before," Marston replied.

"I think not. Anyhow, they did not know all the risk. Peters did. It's significant that he escaped."

"You don't imply that he ought not to have escaped?" Chisholm said, with some surprise.

"Certainly not. Still the fellow's cunning and greedy. I expect he got up the expedition, and he gambled with his companions' lives. If he had won, I don't imagine they would have got much of the reward."

Mabel studied Wyndham. It was plain that he did not like Peters and she thought he had some grounds for resenting his attempt to explore the country. Wyndham was a trader and Peters, no doubt, a rival, but she did not think he was altogether moved by commercial jealousy. Somehow the thing went deeper than this. His voice was level, but she saw his calm was forced. Mabel remembered that he had taken some time to light his cigarette.

"The half-breeds seem to be a lot of savage brutes," Chisholm remarked. "What stock do they spring from? The Carib?"

"The African strain is strongest, and pure negroes are numerous. In Central and part of South America, it's hard to fix the origin of the population. About the cities, they've made some progress and a number of their institutions are good. In the swamps I know best, they have gone back to rules of life the slaves brought from Africa long since. If you want to understand them, that's important."

"Do you think the Bat had anything to do with the explorers getting killed?" Marston asked.

"We don't know they were killed, and the Bat's

rather a bogey of yours," Wyndham replied. "Anyhow, from one point of view, perhaps his efforts to keep out Peters and his gang were justified. The country belongs to the Bat and his friends; their rules are not ours, but they suit the people who use them, and I expect they know what often happens to a colored race when white men take control. Semi-civilization and industrial servitude, forced on you for others' benefit, are a poor exchange for liberty."

"You mean their leaders know?" said Mabel. "They would lose their power when the white men came?"

Wyndham said nothing for a moment and Marston imagined he was getting impatient. Then Flora gave him a puzzled glance and he smiled.

"Did the fellow you thought the Bat look very powerful, Bob?" he asked.

"In a way, he did not," said Marston. "He was a dirty, ragged old impostor — and yet I don't know. Perhaps it was his grin, but you got a hint that he was a bigger man than he looked. There was something about him ——"

"Something Mephistophelian?" Wyndham suggested with a twinkle.

"But Mephistopheles was rather a gentleman," Flora remarked.

"That's it! You have given me the clew I was feeling for," said Marston. "You felt the old fellow might have been a gentleman long since and had degenerated. Now I come to think of it, his confounded grin was ironical; as if he knew your point of view and laughed at it. In fact, I imagine he laughed at himself; at his claim to be a magician and

the tricks he used. A cynical brute, perhaps, but he was not a fool."

"Aren't you getting romantic, Bob?" Flora asked.

Marston said nothing. He had seen Wyndham's frown and imagined he had had enough. For a few moments Mabel studied both. She saw Bob wanted to talk about something else, but she did not mean to help him yet. His portrait of the old mulatto had given her ground for thought. For one thing, it had disturbed Wyndham, and she wondered why. She was not deceived when Wyndham laughed.

"As a rule, Bob is not romantic, but he was ill before he left the lagoon and fever excites one's imagination. We'll let it go. Did you shift the ballast they stowed forward of *Red Rose's* mast, Bob?"

"I did. We moved half a ton of iron and she trims much better with it aft," Marston replied.

Then they talked about the yacht until Mabel got up and took them to the drawing-room. She was curious, but in the meantime did not think her curiosity would be satisfied. Bob knew no more than he had told and it was plain that Wyndham meant to use reserve.

CHAPTER V

WYNDHAM CHANGES HIS PLAN

THERE was no wind, the sun was hot, and the reflection of *Red Rose's* mast and rigging trembled on the shining sea. She rode at anchor in a quiet bay, near the woods that rolled down to the smooth white boulders. Dark firs checkered the fresh green of the beeches and the bronzy yellow of the new oak leaves. The tide flowed smoothly past the yacht, and across the strait a lonely cloud threw a soft blue shadow on the scarred face of a lofty crag. Now and then the echoes of a blasting shot rolled among the hills. Flora sat in the yacht's cockpit. She wore a pale yellow dress that harmonized with her brown eyes and hair. Wyndham lay on the counter, smoking a cigarette, and when she thought he did not see her Flora gave him a careful glance. After a few days at sea, Harry's face was getting brown and he was losing his jaded look, but he was thin and she did not like the way his mouth was set. He had been working hard for some time, and now he had taken a holiday the strain he had borne did not relax. Flora did not altogether understand this, because things were going well with Wyndhams'.

She looked up the strait. Not far off an old castle stood upon a lawn where a long green point ran out, and the spot had romantic memories for her. She had promised to marry Harry on the lawn, one summer night when the yacht's lanterns twinkled in the

roadstead and colored fires burned on the castle walls. Wyndham lifted his head, and smiled when he saw where she was looking.

"It is not very long since, scarcely twelve months, but much has happened in the meantime," he said.

"How did you know—?" Flora asked and blushed.

"Your thoughts were in your eyes; gentle thoughts. It looks as if you were not disillusioned yet!"

"I'm not," said Flora, firmly. "For all that, I don't know if I like you when you're cynical."

"It's a relapse, or perhaps a reaction. Living up to your standard is a bit of a strain now and then."

"Would you sooner I lowered the standard?"

"Not at all," said Wyndham, with a twinkle. "Keep it as high as you can for yourself, so long as you are willing to make some allowances for me."

"That's a man's point of view," Flora remarked. "However, on the whole, you're very good. I really don't get many jars."

She studied him and mused. Harry was all, or very nearly all, she had thought, and she was happy. Sometimes, perhaps, she wished he would give her a little more of his confidence, about the office for example. The control of the extending business was not easy; she saw he had cares he did not talk about. He was a handsome man and she approved the fastidious neatness of his white yachting clothes, but he looked fine-drawn. Flora rather liked this half-ascetic look; Harry had no gross passions to draw him away from her, although she sometimes feared she had a rival in his ambition. He was ambitious and did not tell her much about his plans.

She looked about. Near the point, a little varnished boat shone in the strong light. Bob had taken Mabel for a row in the dinghy.

"I'm sorry for them," she remarked.

"Sorry for whom?" said Wyndham, and turned his head. "Oh, yes; it's hard for Bob! Mabel, no doubt, gets some satisfaction from feeling she's doing what she ought. I, myself, don't know if she ought or not, but this doesn't matter so long as Bob's persuaded. Well, I suppose she's worth waiting for and Bob is patient."

"You are not patient," Flora rejoined. "You refused to wait."

Wyndham gave her a twinkling smile. "No; I hadn't Bob's advantages. I seized my chance, and made a plunge. So, I think, did you!"

"After all, I wasn't very rash. I knew you better than my friends; but I'll own to feeling proud because they're all satisfied. You were not very long persuading them."

"It cost me something," said Wyndham quietly. "However, we'll let it go. I mean to have a lazy day and brace up for our climbing trip in the morning. I sent a message that we would need a car."

Flora nodded and glanced at a peak that rose behind the hills across the sparkling strait. She was a mountaineer and sometimes wondered whether she liked best the high rocks or the sea. Then she turned and noted a long plume of smoke that rolled across the woods.

"The early boat from town," she said.

A steamer swung round the point and headed for the yacht, piling the oily water in a wave at her bows.

The thud of her paddles nearly drowned the music of the band on board, and confused echoes rang among the trees. A group of passengers forward sang lustily and a row leaned against the rail.

"She'll pass pretty close," said Wyndham. "I wonder whether anybody we know is on board."

Flora picked up the glasses and Wyndham, resting on his elbow, turned his head. The steamer drove on, a feather of foam shooting up her stem, and Wyndham languidly studied the faces of the passengers. Then, when she was level with the yacht, he moved abruptly, for a short, thin man with a yellow face sat on a bench, looking at *Red Rose*.

"Do you see somebody? Shall I give you the glasses?" Flora asked.

"No," said Wyndham, sharply. "Hold fast! Look out for her wash!"

Flora seized the coaming and the white wave from the steamer's paddles lifted the yacht. *Red Rose* plunged violently and when she steadied, the passenger boat was slowing near the pier. Flora put down the glasses and turned to Wyndham. She had seen the little man on the bench and imagined Harry was studying him. The fellow looked like a foreigner and she did not like his face. Yet it was strange his being on board the steamer had annoyed Harry. She thought it had annoyed him, although the need to warn her about the wash perhaps accounted for the sharpness of his voice.

"I saw all I wanted," Wyndham resumed, with a touch of grimness. "I thought you might drop the glasses when the wave struck us. If I wasn't lazy, I'd send a complaint to the office about their driving

their boats full speed across a yacht anchorage. Has the splash hurt your dress?"

Flora looked down and shook the sparkling drops from the thin material.

"This stuff won't spoil. A dress that will spoil is no use for yachting; I've been to sea before."

Soon afterwards the others returned. They had promised to lunch with Chisholm at the hotel where Flora and Mabel had a room, but by and by Wyndham remarked:

"I feel rather dull and think I won't go ashore. Perhaps you had better stay, Bob, and we'll fit the new rigging screws. The others look as if the hooks might draw in a hard breeze."

"Stay if you like," said Flora. "You have come for a holiday. Are you sure you feel equal to our climb in the morning?"

Wyndham hesitated. "I'd hate to disappoint you, but I am lazy. I found the scramble up the big gully hard enough the last time I went along the ridge, and I hadn't been to Africa then. After close work in an office, three thousand feet and some awkward rock climbing is a stiff pull."

Flora looked at the others. Harry was tired and rather slack, and she wanted to indulge him. It was something of a relief when Marston played up.

"We came for a cruise, not to climb hills," he said. "Let's stop and go fishing in the dinghy."

"There aren't many fish and digging bait's a bother," Wyndham replied. "I've a better plan. The wind will turn east at sunset and there is a moon. Suppose we run down the coast to Carmeltown and see the Irish boats finish their cross-channel race?"

The others agreed and in the evening *Red Rose* left the anchorage. It was getting dark when they hoisted sail, but Marston, who occupied with the halyards, thought he heard a distant shout. Looking round, he saw a dinghy near the point.

"Is that somebody hailing us?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said Wyndham. "There are other boats about. But be careful; you've got the top-sail yard foul of the lift."

Marston pulled the yard clear, and dropping down the channel through the sands, they stole out to sea. A light east wind blew behind them, the water sparkled as the moon rose, and shadowy woods and dark hills opened out and faded on their port side. The night was warm, the sea ran in long undulations, wrinkled by the breeze. In the distance one heard surf break upon the reefs, and now and then a steamer with throbbing engines went by. Wyndham lounged at the tiller, Marston and Mabel sat under the booby hatch and talked quietly, while Flora, in the cockpit sang a song. *Red Rose,* lurching gently with all sail set, headed for the west.

"Harry's plan is good," Flora remarked when she finished her song. "There are two grand things, the sea and the mountains; but, on a night like this, I like the sea best."

"Then you ought to be happy and I hope you are," rejoined Mabel. "The trouble about dividing your affection between two objects is, when you get one you feel you want the other."

"That is so now and then," Flora agreed. "When you can't have both, you are forced to choose and choosing's generally hard."

"You let Harry choose for you. Perhaps it's a good plan, but I don't know if I'll use it much with Bob."

Flora laughed and thought Mabel's remark was justified. It looked as if Harry had meant to leave the strait, although he had said nothing about this until the passenger boat arrived. Anyhow, it did not matter. She was glad to indulge him and it was a splendid night for a sail. Flora was happy and began to sing again.

The wind freshened as they crossed a rock-fringed bay where a famous emigrant ship went down. Sparkling ripples flecked the swell, which presently began to roll in short angry waves. The rigging hummed, a foaming wake ran astern, and a white ridge stood up about *Red Rose's* bows. After a time, Marston and the paid hand set a smaller jib and hauled down the topsail, and when they had finished Bob stood on deck looking about. The sea ahead was white and *Red Rose* rolled hard when the rising combers picked her up. Astern, the dinghy sheered about and lifted half her length out of the water when she felt the strain on the rope. Once or twice she surged forward on a wave, as if she were going to leap on board. Marston had seen enough and jumped into the cockpit.

"It's freshening up," he said. "The tide will be running strong round Carmel when we get there and the sea breaks awkwardly in the race. If you're going on, we'll heave down a reef and pull the dinghy on deck."

Wyndham looked at his watch. "I don't know if I'm going on or not. The flood's running now and

there are two nasty races before we reach Carmel. Suppose we make for Porth Gwynedd? I don't see much use in getting wet."

"The Porth's an awkward harbor to enter in the dark," Marston remarked thoughtfully.

"I know the way," said Wyndham. "Mrs. Evans will give the girls a room; we have got her up late at night before. Ask them what they think?"

Flora and Mabel agreed, Wyndham changed his course, and the dark hills they were following got nearer. By and by Marston hauled down the staysail and stood on the deck forward, studying the forbidding coast Wyndham steered for.

A narrow strip of gloom, piercing the hills, indicated a valley, and at its end a dim red light blinked. One could see no entrance. Shadowy rocks dropped to the water, and a line of foam marked the course of the tide across a reef. A white belt of surf glimmered without a break at the foot of the cliffs.

Wyndham, however, did not hesitate and Flora glanced at him with quiet confidence. The moonlight touched his face and she liked his calm. One could trust Harry when there was a strain; she was proud of his pluck and steady nerve. Besides, he looked strangely handsome and virile as he controlled the plunging yacht.

When the white turmoil on the reef was close ahead she saw a break in the rocks. The gap was dark and very narrow; spouting foam played about its mouth. Wyndham signed to the fisher lad at the mainsheet, blocks rattled, and *Red Rose*, swerving, listed over until her lee deck was in the foam. Showers of spray blew across her, she was sailing very fast, and Flora

knew she would soon be broken on the rocks if Wyndham missed the harbor mouth.

They drove past the reef, the long boom lurched across, and *Red Rose* rolled violently. Dark rocks towered above her mast and the sails thrashed and filled in the conflicting gusts, but the water got smooth and the harbor opened up. Presently Marston jumped to the foot of the mast and the peak of the mainsail swung down.

"Starboard!" he shouted. "Look out for the perch!"

Flora looked under the sail and saw a tall post with iron stays running from it into the water. She wondered whether the flapping canvas hid it from Wyndham, because he was slow to move the helm.

"Starboard it is," he answered after a moment or two, leaning hard on the tiller as he pushed it across.

There was a heavy shock, something cracked and broke, and a thick iron bar ground against the yacht's side. She slowed but did not stop and when she forged ahead again Marston leaped forward.

"Bobstay's gone and bowsprit's broken at the cap!" he shouted.

"Down sail! Ready with the anchor," said Wyndham quietly.

Marston dropped the anchor under the bows, running chain rattled, and *Red Rose* stopped. They pulled up the half-swamped dinghy and when they had thrown out the water Marston took a rope to a pier. Wyndham went forward and occupied himself with the wreck at the bows until Marston returned.

"We'll need a new bowsprit and she's drawn the stay-bolt on the stem," he said. "I think that's all,

but it will keep us here two or three days. Perhaps you had better see if you can wake Mrs. Evans before we land the girls."

Marston pulled up the harbor and returning after a time said Mrs. Evans was getting a room ready. Flora and Mabel got on board the dinghy and when Marston rowed them to the steps Mabel remarked: "I suppose Harry couldn't see the perch?"

"He could hear me shout," said Marston. "I made noise enough. If he'd shoved his helm over, instead of looking for the perch, we'd have gone past. I don't quite understand it, because Harry's not often slow. However, a new bowsprit doesn't cost much; the only trouble is, we'll have to stay while somebody makes it."

Flora said nothing, although she was somewhat puzzled. On the whole, she imagined Harry had not looked for the perch; the sail was in his way. He was slow to move the helm and she thought this strange. All the same, it was not important, and she talked to Mabel about the Welsh landlady as they went to the inn.

CHAPTER VI

PETERS RENEWS HIS OFFER

RED ROSE remained in port for a week. Wyndham needed a stay and fastenings for the new bowsprit, and although the Welsh ship-chandler could supply him with galvanized iron articles he sent to Southampton for copper. Marston thought this curious, but Harry was fastidious about the boat and for use in salt water copper was better than iron. The party, however, was not bored. Porth Gwynedd, with its small slate houses standing between the clear, green water and the quarries that scarred the face of a hill, was picturesque. The breeze was light and warm, and sunshine sparkled on the sea. They went fishing, swam about a sheltered cove, and climbed the rocks. Wyndham's mood was cheerful and Flora was content. She thought Harry was recovering from the strain; a rest was all he needed and she was glad she had persuaded him to make the cruise.

When the new bowsprit was fitted they set off again along the coast and stopped at another rock-bound port. A summer hotel stood by a cove outside the little town, and a day or two after their arrival Marston and Wyndham lounged on the terrace by the water at the end of the lawn. The spot was sheltered by a tall cliff, and a thick shrubbery ran between the grass and terrace. Flora and Mabel occupied a bench in a nook cut out of the thick foliage.

The sun was hot, and all was very quiet but for the drowsy splash of water on the rocks and the intermittent rustle of leaves.

"I like this spot," said Flora. "I have enjoyed the cruise. There's something about the sea that soothes one."

"Do you need soothing?" Mabel asked.

Flora smiled, a rather thoughtful smile. "Not in a way. I've good grounds for being satisfied; but I had begun to get disturbed about Harry. He works too hard. No doubt he's forced to bother about his business, but he looked thin and was sometimes moody."

"He has done too much," Mabel agreed. "Bob tells me things are going remarkably well for Wyndhams'. All the same, I expect it has cost Harry some effort."

"Harry does not grudge the effort," said Flora. "I grudge it for him. It was mainly for my sake he went abroad and overtaxed his strength in an unhealthy climate in order to make Wyndhams' prosperous." She stopped and looked up, knitting her brows. "Here is the little man I saw on board the steamer! I wonder what he wants."

Mabel studied the man who crossed the lawn. She remembered that she had seen him at Flora's wedding. His face was yellow and wrinkled, and although he wore light summer clothes made in the latest English fashion there was something foreign about him. He went towards the shrubbery with quick resolute steps.

"It's Peters, somebody Bob and Harry met abroad," Mabel remarked. "No doubt he's looking for them; they're on the terrace not far off."

"It's strange, but I feel I'd sooner he hadn't come," said Flora with a frown.

The man vanished behind the shrubs and a few moments afterwards Wyndham, lighting a cigarette on the terrace, dropped the match.

"Peters!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo!" said Marston, who turned and gave the newcomer an unfriendly glance. "We didn't expect you."

Peters sat down on a bench. "All the same, I have followed you along the coast for a week. Felt I needed a change after my adventures with the exploring party, which I dare say you heard about. Business was slack, and I had a dispute with my employers. I resolved to give up my post, caught a Royal Mail boat, and here I am."

"I don't see why you followed us," said Marston, coldly.

"Then I must explain. Some time since, I suggested your giving me a partnership. The plan has some extra advantages now."

"The advantages are not very obvious," Marston rejoined.

"Let me state them," said Peters, coolly. "The back country behind the lagoon is disturbed; there are indications that the negroes and half-breeds mean to rebel and Ramon Larrinaga is resolved to put them down. It's possible he may do so, but I doubt."

"I don't know if this is much of an argument for our extending our business in the neighborhood. But why do you doubt Don Ramon's ability to keep order?"

"It's an argument for your putting a man who

knows the country in control. If a rebellion breaks out, there will be opportunities for business such as one seldom gets; that is, if the situation's cleverly handled. But we'll let this go in the meantime. Larrinaga has a cunning antagonist who is much stronger than he thinks."

"You mean the Bat?"

Peters nodded. "I expect you have heard about the black Napoleon who founded a negro state in the Antilles? Well, it's not impossible the Bat will make himself as powerful as the other."

"Ridiculous!" said Marston. "Such things can't be done again; the times have changed."

"I wonder whether Wyndham thinks it ridiculous. He's better informed than you," Peters said meaningly.

Marston turned to Wyndham, but he said nothing. His face was set and he looked as if he tried to brace himself.

"You had an example of the Bat's power not long since," Peters went on. "My exploring companions were poisoned, but not before the tropical diseases man had made some interesting discoveries. Although the swamp-belt is unhealthy, malarial fever is not so common as some people think. In fact, it does not account for all the fatal sickness."

"Yet strangers die from fever and among the half-breeds the mortality is large."

"That is so," Peters agreed. "All the same, my notion is, it's better to study Obeah than medicine, and, if you want to enjoy good health, cultivate the friendship of the Bat. He knows how to get rid of people he disapproves."

"The brute ought to be shot! However, I don't see what this has got to do with our giving you a share in our business."

"I think your partner sees," said Peters, meaningly, and Wyndham advanced a few steps with his fist clenched. His eyes shone and the veins on his forehead swelled; but when Marston thought he would seize the other he stopped a yard or two off.

"How much do you know?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Nearly all, I think," Peters replied, and turned to Marston. "The Bat is clever and knows how to use the natural products of the swamps. In fact, I imagine some of his discoveries would surprise our doctors. He cannot, however, make all he needs, and somebody has supplied him with arms and cartridges, besides chemicals and drugs in use in civilized countries. It's sometimes an advantage to cure your friends as well as destroy your antagonists, and the power of an up-to-date Obeah man is not altogether founded on magic."

"Who has supplied him?" Marston asked, with strange and horrible misgivings.

Peters smiled. "You were very dull for some time, but I think you begin to see. Well, I suppose you can comfort yourself with the reflection that when you shared the profit you didn't know how it was earned."

Marston turned and struggled for control when he saw Wyndham's face. The sweat stood on the latter's forehead and he shrank from his comrade's glance.

"Is this true, Harry?" Marston asked. "Have we been backing that devilish mulatto?"

"You know now," said Wyndham, with forced quietness. "It looks as if you had got a nasty knock. I'd hoped you would not find out."

Marston tried to pull himself together. He must be calm, but calm was hard. Peters gave him a mocking smile.

"There's something yet. The Bat is not a mulatto."

"Not a mulatto?" said Marston dully. "What is he then?"

"A white man. If you're not satisfied, ask your partner. He knows him best."

"Who is the Bat, Harry?"

"Rupert Wyndham," Wyndham answered and turned his head.

For a moment or two Marston said nothing, and then his lethargy vanished. Horror gave way to fury and he clenched his hand as he turned to Peters.

"You have shot your bolt and missed," he said. "You're a cunning brute, but all the same a fool. Now get off, or I'll throw you over the wall."

Peters hesitated. His surprise was plain, and Wyndham's tense face softened to a grim smile. Peters had not reckoned on Bob. The latter advanced upon him threateningly.

"Did you think you could blackmail us?" he resumed with a hoarse laugh. "That we'd take you for a partner in order to keep you silent while we got rich? The thing's ridiculous! Now you begin to understand this, aren't you going?"

Peters said nothing and went. His mistake was obvious; he might have forced Wyndham to accept his terms, but he had misjudged Marston. When he

had gone, Marston sat down, rather limply, and there was silence for a few minutes.

"Well?" said Wyndham at length.

Marston looked up. "I have got a knock, but the thing's done and there's no use in calling myself a careless fool. For all that, I ought to have seen what was going on; I'm a partner in the house."

"And if you had seen?" Wyndham asked.

"I'd have stopped the business and brought you away."

"It's possible. You're a resolute fellow, Bob. But what are you going to do about it now?"

"Put things straight; as far as money can put them straight," said Marston, quietly. "The cost doesn't matter. It's lucky I am rich."

"Then you don't mean to break the partnership and give me up?"

"Certainly not," said Marston in a surprised voice. "We are partners for good and bad, and Mabel is Flora's friend. When we started for Africa, she told me my job was to stand by you."

Wyndham laughed, a bitter laugh. "It looks as if I didn't cheat Mabel when I cheated all the rest. But you had better let me go before your staunchness costs you too much."

"I'm going to stick to you," Marston declared. "I undertook the job; there's no more to be said." He paused and resumed quietly: "How did you get into Rupert Wyndham's power?"

Wyndham's grimness vanished. He looked embarrassed and moved. "You're a very good sort, Bob. I don't know if I did get into his power; anyhow, not at first. I rather think ambition carried me

away. You have not known poverty; I doubt if you'll understand."

"I'll try," said Marston, and Wyndham went on:

"The house was bankrupt when I got control, and I was in love with Flora. Perhaps you think it was dishonorable to tell her so. Well, I haven't your scruples and we Wyndhams like a risk. The worst was, I let her run a risk she didn't know. We met the Bat at the lagoon and he showed me how I could get rich. He knew me; I didn't know him at the beginning. Can't you see the situation? I'd won the girl I loved, but I must support my wife. I couldn't force her to bear hardship because she loved me, and, for her sake, I must satisfy her friends. Well, I saw and seized my chance, and almost before I knew I'd gone so far I could not draw back."

"Did you want to draw back?" Marston asked.

Wyndham gave him a curious smile. "You're cleverer than people think, Bob. Sometimes I was sorry I had begun, but I imagine I would not have stopped if I could. I meant to get rich; to give Flora a high place, and — though the statement looks ironical — to justify myself. Well, I went on until bad luck sent Peters to pull me up."

Marston pondered for a moment or two. "Now I understand why the witches in *Macbeth* made me think about the Bat; they tempted him with lying promises. But I'm not much of a philosopher and we have the Bat to reckon on. Peters doesn't count."

"Doesn't he count?" Wyndham asked.

"Not at all," said Marston. "When he told me his secret, he lost the power to bully you. The fellow's a fool; he thought me greedy."

"But he can tell others, Larrinaga, for example."

"That's not important," said Marston quietly. "We don't want to earn more money by helping the Bat. We're going to put things straight, and if Larrinaga's government has a just claim on us, we must pay."

"After all, the Bat's my uncle," Wyndham remarked.

"Yes," said Marston. "It complicates things. We must go out again and get him away."

"Get him away? The man is powerful. I doubt if the government can put him down."

"For all that we're going to try."

"You're an obstinate fellow, Bob. We'll talk about it again. There is somebody else Peters might tell."

"Flora? He'll be too late. You must tell her now."

For a moment or two Wyndham's mouth set firm and the sweat stood on his forehead. Then he said quietly, "It will be a hard job, desperately hard; all the same, I suppose it can't be put off. Rupert Wyndham and the powers he stands for have cheated me, but I must pay."

Marston made a sign of agreement. "When you have paid, you're free, and can begin again."

Then he turned and saw Flora in the narrow path between the bushes. Her face was white, but her eyes were gentle when she looked at him. "Thank you, Bob! We owe you much," she said.

Marston pulled himself together and gave her a friendly smile. Then he touched Wyndham's arm, as if to encourage him, and left them alone.

CHAPTER VII

WYNDHAM PLEADS GUILTY

WHEN Marston had gone Flora sat down on the bench. She was pale and trembled. Wyndham, looking very grim, leaned against the wall. They were quiet for a moment or two, and then he asked:

"How much did you hear?"

"I heard enough," said Flora, with an effort for calm. "I don't understand it all, but I must understand. I heard Bob's voice, sharp and angry, and came to see if you were quarreling with the strange little man. Then I stopped where the shrubs are thick. Perhaps I oughtn't——"

"It doesn't matter," Wyndham replied. "Bob urged that you must be told and I think I meant to tell you anyhow. When one is found out, it's better to plead guilty. Well, what do you want to know?"

Flora turned her head. His stern coldness hurt. She thought he feared her judgment would be merciless. Harry did not know her yet.

"Well?" he said again.

"I must know all. You helped the man they call the Bat? You sent him goods he needed; drugs among other things, although you knew he would use some to poison people and make the superstitious negroes think him a magician?"

"Yes," said Wyndham. "At least, I gave him drugs. I don't altogether know how he used the stuff."

"He poisoned the explorers who went into the bush."

"It's possible," said Wyndham. "I think that's all."

"Still you knew he was cunning and cruel. You knew he killed people who wouldn't obey him and he used magic."

"I don't know much about Voodoo and can't state if it's magic or tricks. However, I imagine the Bat did use it against people who disputed his rule."

"He gave you valuable goods; you were getting rich," Flora resumed. Then she paused and added in a gentler voice: "He gave you pearls; but you sent me none, although Bob brought some for Mabel. You said they were unlucky."

"It looks as if I was a romantic sentimentalist. Anyhow, I didn't want you to wear pearls I got from the Bat."

"Yet you were willing to trade with him! You gave him your support!"

"I did," said Wyndham grimly. "For a tempting price. Now my luck has turned and I won't get the price. My reward has vanished when it was in my hands. Nothing is left."

Flora pondered. In a sense, she thought he exaggerated, because much was left. All the same, she was glad he had been cheated and the reward for his wrongdoing had gone. He might have wanted to keep it, and her refusal to share it might have separated them. Still she would not think about this yet. She must break down his stern calm and much depended on the line she took.

"You misjudged me and perhaps that accounted

for your giving way," she said. "You thought I hadn't pluck enough to marry you when you were poor? My dear, I loved you and knew you were not rich!"

"You hadn't known poverty. There was another thing; your father made stipulations and of course he was justified. I was forced to satisfy him and your friends. Would you have liked them to pity you for a romantic fool whom a common adventurer had carried away?"

"Ah," said Flora, "you didn't know my friends much better than you know me! Mabel's my friend and she let her lover go away. I think it hurt Bob when he found out what you had done; but has he turned from you?"

Wyndham said nothing and she resumed: "However, all this is not important now. You can't go on. What are you going to do?"

"It looks as if Bob had made some plans for me. I don't know yet if I'll consent. My plan is simpler and would save him trouble and risk. It depends on you if I carry it out."

Flora gave him a quick glance, for his manner was baffling. He looked stern and his mouth was set.

"How does it depend on me?" she asked.

"I cheated you and your father and you have found me out. You know how deep in the mud I've gone and it wouldn't be strange if you thought I might go deeper. I expect you have lost all trust in me. Well, if the shock's too great, you must give me up. I'll drop out, vanish like my uncle, and trouble you no more."

Flora laughed, a hoarse, emotional laugh that shook her and brought the blood to her skin.

"You thought I would give you up? You have been afraid of this since you saw Peters at the church and you dropped the ring? Oh, but you are very dull! I love you and it was for my sake you did wrong. Well, I am not afraid to share the punishment. If I could save you, I'd bear it all. The thing that hurts is, you doubted if I was brave enough."

"I knew your pluck; you gave me proof when you married me. For all that, I knew your hatred of shabbiness and wrong. I'm an unsuccessful criminal."

"All the same you are my husband," said Flora quietly.

Wyndham looked hard at her and hesitated.

"My dear," he said, "I cannot urge this claim. It would hurt less to leave you than try to keep you if you shrank."

"Then you doubt me yet?"

"No. I'm ashamed and humbled. I don't know what I ought to do, or what I ought to say."

"There is not much to be said, but it is difficult. Come here, Harry, and give me your hand. One hates to talk like a moralizing prig and it does no good; but you have gone down hill for me and I want to help you back."

Wyndham came to the bench and she took his hand in hers. "I am your wife and will not let you go," she went on. "Still you must give up the money you have earned and put straight the harm you have done. It doesn't matter if this makes us poor.

I can go without much you have given me. I'd be glad to go without!"

"Ah," he said with strong emotion, "I didn't know you, Flora! Although you hate my offense, you mean to stick to me?"

"My dear! I expect the temptation was very strong and at the beginning you did not know all you did. It was rather horrible to help a renegade outcast to plot against civilized rule and try to put in its place superstitious cruelty. But that's done with. We must think how we can make good."

"I can't make good at my cost. You and Bob must pay, and I cheated Bob."

"Bob will bear you no grudge and I want to help."

"Very well," said Wyndham, with forced quietness. "You have given me a chance I don't deserve to get straight again, and I'd be a meaner brute than I am if I let it go." He got up and his face was very resolute. "Now I'll look for Bob."

He went off and Flora, although badly shaken, was satisfied. She had saved her husband from the Bat and from himself. He had not protested much; on the whole he had been reserved and cold, but she knew he was moved and one could trust him when he looked like that. She began to feel comforted and get back her calm. The soft splash of languid waves on the rocks beyond the terrace was soothing. Except for this, all was very quiet and the quietness steadied her.

By-and-by she heard a step, and looking up, saw Peters had come back. He smiled, but his smile was cruel and she shrank from him with a quick half-conscious movement. Peters took off his hat.

"Mrs. Wyndham, I believe?" he said.

"I am Mrs. Wyndham," Flora replied. "What do you want?"

"A few minutes' talk. I imagine you will be interested."

Flora hated him. He knew Harry's offense and meant to use his power; perhaps to demand money and perhaps for revenge. He had power, but since she and Bob knew Harry's guilt, not as much as he thought. She wanted to make him feel the scorn and loathing he excited. All the same, she might find out something useful if she led him on. He was an unscrupulous antagonist and she meant to fight for her husband. She made a vague sign of agreement and Peters sat down on some steps in the terrace wall.

"Your father holds an important post and your friends are well-known people," he began. "I expect you value their rather exclusive society."

"What has this to do with you?" Flora asked.

Peters made a deprecating gesture. "Wyndhams' has now some standing on the exchange; the house's credit is pretty good, and people are beginning to think your husband a clever business man. Wyndham is clever, but for a man to build up a business he must be known for something else. If he wants to command people's trust, he must keep certain rules."

"I suppose that is so," Flora agreed with forced carelessness.

"Very well," said Peters. "I'm afraid Wyndhams' new prosperity rests on an unsafe foundation. A statement about their trade on the Caribbean would shake it badly; in fact, I doubt if the house would stand the shock. A merchant must enjoy his customers' confidence and confidence is soon destroyed."

"You imply you could destroy the confidence people have in Wyndhams'?"

"It is possible. For all that, I hesitate — You see, you, and to some extent Commodore Chisholm, would be involved in your husband's fall. But I needn't labor this. You know how prosperous conventional people treat friends who lose their place."

Flora struggled for calm, but her eyes flashed and the blood came to her skin.

"Oh," she said, forgetting the part she meant to play, "you want a bribe? Money to be silent? You could not rob my husband, so you came to me! You think I am weaker and you can work on my fears?"

"It looks as if he had told you something," Peters remarked coolly. "I do not think he has told you all."

There was a step on the path behind them and as Flora turned Marston advanced. His face was red and very grim. Bob was generally calm, but he was savage now.

"Suppose you leave the thing to me? I saw the fellow coming here," he said to Flora, and stopped in front of Peters. "You haven't gone yet? I had some trouble to get rid of you before, and don't mean to be bothered by you again. This is the last annoyance you will give us."

Moving forward deliberately, he seized the other and swung him off his feet. Peters was short and light, for fever had worn him thin; Marston was big and powerful. He got a good hold where the other's clothes were slack, and lifting him with a strong effort, went up the steps. Peters kicked and struggled. Marston gasped and when his hat fell off Flora

laughed. She was moved by a reaction after the strain. When Marston reached the top step he held Peters over the edge of the wall.

"The tide's low," he said hoarsely, with obvious disappointment. "I was going to throw you into the water."

"If you drop me, somebody would find me on the rocks," Peters replied in a breathless voice, and Flora tried to stop her wild laughter. Her control was vanishing and the scene was ludicrous. Peters had looked grotesque while he wriggled in Bob's grasp and now his coolness supplied a last touch of grim humor.

"I don't know if it's worth while to go to jail for you and perhaps it's not," Marston gasped. He put Peters down and shook him savagely. "For a blackmailer, you're a poor sort of fool. Can't you see yet how you've muddled things? You can't tell Mrs. Wyndham more than she knows, and I won't pay you to tell nobody else. You'll get no bribe for letting Wyndhams' carry on the lagoon trade, because the trade has stopped for good. It ought to be obvious that your hold on us has gone and now you're going too."

He paused and seizing Peter's shoulders turned him round and half pushed and half threw him across the terrace. Peters fell into a clump of shrubs, and getting up, stole away in silence. Then Marston turned to Flora.

"Sorry! I expect you don't approve, but I felt I must let myself go. When people make me think about that confounded lagoon I get savage."

"I do approve," said Flora, trying to be calm. "Perhaps it wasn't really humorous, but I was forced

to laugh. Did you meet Harry? He went to look for you."

"No," said Marston. "I want to see him, and after this little exploit expect you'll be glad to get rid of me. However, I think you have got rid of the other fellow."

He found Wyndham writing a letter in the hotel smoking-room, and sitting down opposite, waited until he looked up.

"I suppose you told Flora all about it," Marston remarked.

"I did. Your advice was good."

"It was better than I thought. If you had waited, Peters would have given her his story before she knew yours. I found him trying to begin it a few minutes since."

"Ah," said Wyndham, "it looks as if I had run some risk! After all, I don't know." He paused and resumed with emotion: "I admitted everything, but she trusts me yet; I think she would have trusted me had I put my confession off. It's strange, but I didn't know how staunch my wife is. We'll let this go. What did you do with Peters?"

Marston laughed. "I came near to throwing him over the wall. Held him over the edge and wanted to let him drop; but the brute suggested that somebody would find him on the rocks. I saw the force of this, because the consequences would have been awkward now we have a big job on hand. It's plain that you will need me."

"I do need you. It's lucky I have such a partner. I've got to make restitution and can't do so at my proper cost. Yet I've no claim; I cheated you, as I

cheated my wife. I'm an unsuccessful rogue and didn't let my scruples bother me until I was found out."

"That's sentimental extravagance," Marston said with some embarrassment. "Anyhow, I am your partner and your responsibilities are mine. I don't disown my debts."

"The debts are heavy. I ran them up, without your knowing."

"We can pay," said Marston, smiling. "It won't break us; I'm pretty rich and mean to see you out. You can count on my help and my money; in fact, on all I can give. Now that's done with. There's no more to be said."

Wyndham gave him a quick, grateful glance. "Thanks! You're rash, but I must try not to disappoint you. Friendship like yours is rare."

When Marston went off, he sat for a time, looking straight in front. He felt slack and strangely humbled, but was conscious of a new resolve. Although he had gone far down hill, it was, perhaps, not too late to stop. The climb back would be long and hard; he could never reach his wife's and his friend's level. All the same, he meant to front the ascent. They had borne much for him, he must, so far as he was able, try to repay them.

CHAPTER VIII

UP HILL

THE smoking-room of the Marine Hotel at Carmeltown was crowded with yachtsmen on the evening after the channel regatta. Marston and Wyndham occupied a small table, the former trying to read a newspaper while the latter looked about. The big room echoed with voices, a haze of tobacco smoke drifted round the pillars, and now and then a peal of laughter marked the end of an Irish yachtsman's tale. For all that, Wyndham's face was rather grim, and Marston, looking up by-and-by, thought he was brooding.

"Hallo! Here's Elliot," he exclaimed. "S'pose he came across on the mailboat. I heard her whistle not long since. Thought he was going to stop and see if they could salve *Deva*. Anyhow, I'd like to hear about the collision and it looks as if he was making for us."

"Yes," said Wyndham. "I imagine he wants to see me."

Elliot crossed the floor, stopping now and then when somebody spoke to him, and after a time reached Marston's table, where he sat down.

"I've been trying to get to you for some minutes, but the Irishmen wouldn't let me pass. The news of my bad luck soon got across," he remarked.

"We didn't get much news," said Marston. "What about the boat?"

"She's gone; cut down to the bilge and sunk in six fathoms. No chance of salvage and the navigation board is going to blow her up."

Marston said he was sorry and asked about the collision.

"To begin with, I want a drink," said Elliot, who called a waiter and then resumed: "It was dark and hazy, and we were creeping up to the anchorage at Kingstown with all sail set. I was at the tiller, but the wind was very light and she would hardly steer; the tide was carrying her along. Jevons, looking out under the boom, said he saw a steamer's lights, but just then I heard a North-Wall boat in the fog. You know the noise they make when they're steaming fast, and the fog's pretty bad when those boats slow up. I knew she wasn't far off when I saw her lights: red, white, and green all together. That meant we had to do something quick."

Marston nodded. When a steamer's three lights are seen she is heading direct for the observer.

"Our flare wasn't handy, and the first match broke," Elliot resumed. "Reckon I was awkward and not very cool. However, I got a light and it was a relief when her whistle indicated that she was changing her course; but while I was fumbling with the matches I forgot the other boat. So did Jevons; he owned it afterwards. The North-Wall man went past us, like a train, lights all over the passenger decks and a four-foot wave rolling off the bows. She left us dazzled and rather shaken, and then Jevons shouted that the other fellow was close ahead."

Elliot stopped and drained his glass, and when he went on his voice was hoarse. "We were crossing her bows, close-hauled on the starboard tack. Our business, of course, was to carry on, but our lights were low and not very bright, and as a rule, it's prudent to give a steamer room. Anyhow, I shoved down the helm to bring her round, and told Jevons to get out the big oar when I found her slow. The wind was light and she was plunging on the North-Wall boat's wake. She came headto, and then a roller hit her bows and she fell off. Jevons was trying to pull her round, and for two or three moments I saw the steamer's forecastle. She was a big, clumsy craft, going light, and looked as high as a house.

"Then there was a crash and the mast went. I saw our side deck crumble and the other's stem cut through to the cabin top. Mast and boom were over the side, and when the round of her bow filled our cockpit I knew it was time to go. By good luck, we had towed the dinghy and the steamer held up *Deva* until we got on board. Then as we cut the painter the old boat broke away, and the steamer went on, over the top of her. I imagine she stopped, because we heard her whistle in the fog, but we'd had enough of her and pulled for the beach. We landed at Kingstown, and I think that's all."

Marston sympathized and ordered drinks. Elliot drained his glass and turned to Wyndham.

"Well," he said, "she was insured and I want another boat. What's your price for *Red Rose?*"

"*Red Rose* is not for sale," Marston interposed.

"Then why did Forwood tell me you wanted an offer?"

Marston looked at Wyndham, who nodded. "It's all right, Bob; I'm going to sell." Then he turned to Elliot and stated a sum.

"A moderate price!" the other remarked. "I'll admit it's less than I thought. Is she sound?"

"She is not," Wyndham replied. "Port side's weak where the strain of the rigging comes; she needs some new timbers. The covering board ought to be relaid all round. Keel's shaky aft; the deadwood ought to be lifted ——"

He indicated the repairs he thought necessary and Elliot looked at him with surprise.

"Since you want to sell, aren't you taking a rather unusual line?"

Wyndham smiled. "I allowed for defects when I fixed the price. The carpenter's job will be expensive, but if it's properly done, the boat will afterwards be nearly as good as new. I think you can rely on this."

Marston gave his partner a puzzled glance and Elliot said, "After your frankness, I'll buy her and take my chance."

"I imagine it's a safe investment," Wyndham rejoined.

For a few moments Elliot was quiet and then he fixed his eyes on Wyndham and said in a thoughtful voice, "*Red Rose* is fast and you sailed her cleverly. All the same, I never understood how you beat us when you won the Commodore's cup."

"I imagine I went the wrong side of the Knoll buoy," Wyndham answered coolly. "Perhaps this gave us some advantage, because the tide runs longer near the coast."

Marston moved abruptly, but Wyndham went on: "I'm not certain; but if you had filed a protest, I wouldn't have claimed the prize. Bob thought he saw something in the haze. It might have been a gull, but it might have been the buoy. Anyhow, we went on and the tide carried us along the shore."

The short silence that followed had a hint of strain. Wyndham knew Elliot knew his winning the race had appealed to Flora's imagination. Moreover, he thought Elliot had wanted to marry Flora and would have had Chisholm's support. Marston saw they had got on awkward ground, and felt embarrassed.

"After all you did beat us and you were not sure it was the buoy," Elliot said, in a quiet, meaning voice. "It's too late to file a protest now. Besides, we were talking about the boat ——"

"I'll put her on the hard, if you'd like a proper survey before you decide."

"No," said Elliot. "I don't think it's needful. Your statement satisfied me. I'll buy her."

He went off and Wyndham gave Marston a smile. "You look surprised, Bob."

"Let's have another drink," said Marston, who called a waiter and then resumed awkwardly: "Elliot played up pretty well. I like the fellow; he's a sportsman, but after all I think it was a gull we saw. Anyhow, we won't bother about it again. Why have you sold *Red Rose?*"

"It ought to be obvious. A yacht costs something and my keeping an expensive toy wouldn't be justified just now."

"Romantic exaggeration! You're frankly ridicu-

lous," said Marston with some warmth. "Wyndhams' isn't going broke."

Wyndham picked up the newspaper and indicated an advertisement. "I really think I'm logical. Perhaps, this ought to persuade you I've made up my mind."

"Preposterous!" Marston exclaimed, throwing down the paper. "Your pretty new house? Besides, it's Flora's house as well as yours!"

"Flora agrees," said Wyndham quietly.

Marston got up and his face was red. "Looks as if you don't mean to let me help much. It's senseless exaggeration; things aren't as bad as you make out. However, I've had enough. I'll get angry if I stay."

"You ought to approve; I imagined you liked a thorough job," Wyndham rejoined, and Marston frowned as he crossed the floor.

Men spoke to him as he passed their tables, but he did not stop and going to the drawing-room found Flora alone. When he came in she put down her book and indicated an easy chair.

"Stop and talk to me, Bob. I was beginning to feel neglected," she said. "But what has happened? You look annoyed."

"I am rather savage," Marston admitted. "Think I'll stand until I get cool. Do you know Harry has sold *Red Rose?*"

"I knew he wanted to sell her," Flora said quietly.

"This is not all. D'you know about the ridiculous advertisement he's put in the newspaper?"

"Of course! I don't altogether see why you are surprised."

Marston hesitated. He did not want to admit he had been surprised, and, after studying Flora thought he could not urge that Wyndham's reformation might be overdone.

"Anyhow, you can see why I'm annoyed," he said. "I'm Harry's partner and am going to marry your oldest friend."

"I have not forgotten this and it helps me to be frank. You're generous, Bob, but Harry has done wrong and must pay. He cannot make good at another's cost."

"The trouble is, *you* must pay. Your house, for example! You planned it, you worked out all the colors, and thought where everything ought to go. The house is beautiful, you're proud of it, and a woman's home means much to her."

Flora turned her head for a moment, but when she looked up again her eyes shone.

"I would sooner be proud of my husband. I am proud now and am going to be prouder. Harry has pluck and meeting obstacles spurs him on. Our part is to encourage him, while he struggles up hill. I know he'll reach the top."

"With a wife like you, he ought to go far," said Marston quietly. "I'm sorry you won't let me help in the way I want, but s'pose I must agree. Don't know if I'm romantic, but I've felt the world's a better place since I knew you and Mabel."

He went off and soon afterwards Chisholm came in, carrying a newspaper.

"What does this mean?" he asked, indicating an advertisement. "Telford showed me the paper. Wanted to know why you were selling the house. I

couldn't tell him. Is Harry getting rich so fast that it isn't big enough?"

Flora smiled. "The story's rather long, but I think you must be told. If we stay here, somebody may come in. Let's go to the breakwater."

She got her hat and crossing a street they reached a long granite wall that ran out to sea. The languid swell beat against the massive, dovetailed blocks, the moon was rising above the gray hills, and when they had passed the landing place there was nobody about. By-and-by Chisholm indicated a mooring post and, when Flora sat down, leaned against the granite parapet.

"My dear," he said, "I've been puzzled recently; had a notion something was wrong. For all that, Wyndhams' was obviously prosperous, Harry's an indulgent husband, and I wouldn't own I'd grounds for bothering, until I saw this advertisement. Well, sometimes it's rash to meddle, but I'm anxious. Tell me all you can."

Flora told him and after she stopped he was quiet for a time. The moonlight touched his face and she saw the lines get deeper. The old Commodore was deeply moved, but she was glad he did not look stern.

"I've got a knock and know how you were hurt. You bear it well," he said. "To some extent, the fault is mine. When Harry wanted to marry you I doubted but gave way. I ought to have been firm."

"You are not accountable," Flora replied. "I wanted you to approve, but I meant to marry Harry. I loved him, though I knew his drawbacks. But this doesn't matter; I love him now."

Chisholm looked at her with knitted brows and she saw he was suffering for her sake.

"You are very staunch, but I knew this. You say Harry means to make reparation. Now he's found out, his repentance is strangely thorough."

"You must not be bitter," said Flora quietly.

"Very well. Let's be practical. Your husband's job will be hard and long. He must carry his load, but part will fall on you. It's already doing so."

"That is just. Much of the fault was mine. I trusted Harry, and after all I trust him better; but at the beginning this was not enough. I wanted you and our friends to know him; to own he had talent and see my pride in him was founded well. In a way, it was a mean ambition. I wanted him to get rich. Not because I'm greedy ——"

"I think I understand," Chisholm remarked. "Perhaps we use the money standard oftener than we ought. It's not high, but all the same, to earn money demands some useful qualities." He paused and added with a sigh: "I am poor and know."

"You are a dear! Your honesty is worth much more money than you could have earned. Then you're not hard, as some honest people are. You will not be hard to Harry now he is trying to make amends?"

"Far from it! What right have I to hurt a broken man?"

Flora smiled. "Harry is bruised, but not broken. Then, you see, I made his temptation stronger. When I ought to have held him back I half-consciously urged him on. It was for my sake he broke rules we try to

keep, and I mustn't grumble if some of his punishment falls on me."

"After all, you did not know what you did."

"I ought to have known; I am his wife. But I think you understand, and there's no more to be said."

Chisholm got up. "A nasty knock, but we can bear it. You have pluck and one can't be beaten when one is not afraid."

They went back silently and near the end of the wall met Wyndham going to the landing steps. Chisholm stopped and gave him his hand.

"Flora has told me all," he said. "Your friends will stand by you."

PART III

REPARATION

CHAPTER I

WYNDHAM PAYS DUTY

RED reflections trembled on the sea, a fringe of languid surf broke along the beach, and as the liner turned a point, a white town that rose in terraces, glimmered like a pearl. A yellow flag ran up to the masthead, the throb of engines slowed, and a noisy launch steamed out from behind the mole. Marston, leaning on the rail, watched her approach, and his look was thoughtful when he turned to Wyndham.

"If Don Ramon got our telegram, he's probably on board," he said. "I hope he is, because if he doesn't come it might imply he means to make things difficult for us. He could if he liked."

"Larrinaga will come," Wyndham replied. "From all accounts, he's a pretty good officer, but I don't expect he neglects his interests while he looks after the State's. I'm counting on this."

"I s'pose one mustn't be fastidious, but I don't want to get involved in fresh intrigue. The job we've undertaken is awkward enough."

"Very awkward," Wyndham agreed, with some dryness. "In a way, it looks too big for us. To begin with, we have got to pay duties we dodged, and satisfy the Government we cheated. Then, without exciting the latter's curiosity, we're going to stop a

rebellion and carry off its leader. There's the worst puzzle. The fellow's cunning and powerful. Moreover, he's my uncle."

He stopped, for the engines clanked noisily as the screw turned astern; then the anchor splashed and the launch swung in to the gangway. The port doctor came on board and after him a man in tight-fitting American clothes. His wide black belt was spun from the finest silk and Marston noted his hat. Indians had woven the delicate material under running water; presidents and dictators wore hats like that, and none of the few produced were sent to Europe. It was obvious that Señor Larrinaga was now a man of importance.

"You sent for me," he said, with a bow.

"The steamer goes on in the morning," Wyndham replied. "We hesitated about landing and calling, for fear we might trespass on your time. By sending a telegram we left you free to refuse. If you are not much occupied, I hope you'll dine on board."

Larrinaga said he was willing and after a time they went to the saloon. For the most part, the passengers had landed and only three or four occupied the tables. By-and-by the others went out and Wyndham opened a fresh bottle of Italian wine. A steward turned on the electric light and soft reflections fell on colored glass and polished wood. Beads of damp sparkled on the white-and-gold ceiling, although the skylights were open and a throbbing fan made a cool draught about the table. Footsteps echoed along the deck and when the steamer rolled the water gurgled about her side, but it was quiet in the saloon. By-and-by Larrinaga put down his glass.

"One likes to meet one's friends, but I do not know if this alone is why you sent for me," he said. "If it is not, you see your servant!"

Wyndham bowed. "We value your friendship and particularly your honesty and tact. There is a matter we thought you might arrange for us."

"If it is possible; but you must be moderate. One is watched and criticized as one rises in rank, and it is difficult to allow one's friends exclusive privileges. To grant too many robs the Government."

"We want to make the Government richer," Wyndham replied. "In fact, we propose to give you a sum that ought to have been paid, in smaller amounts, before. You will, no doubt, be able to hand it to the proper officer, without our being bothered by awkward formalities."

Larrinaga looked at him with puzzled surprise. "In this country one pays when one is forced, and the Government is generally paid last of all. One seldom gives money for which one is not asked."

"We do not mean to rob your Government and my partner is rich enough to be honest," said Wyndham, smiling. "You have no customs officer at the lagoon, and we found on studying our accounts that some duties had not been paid."

"Proper copies of your cargo manifests ought to have been sent the officer at the port where your vessel's clearance papers were stamped."

"I think the manifests were sent, but now and then we got cargo at the last moment as we were going to sea. Besides, the officer was a friend of ours ——"

Larrinaga filled his glass, and while he pondered Wyndham lighted a cigarette. The matter needed

careful handling. It was plain that Larrinaga's surprise had gone and he was cautious.

"Then you propose to give me the money you ought to have paid?" the latter presently remarked.

"Yes," said Wyndham. "We are traders and must get on with our business, while the officer we knew has given up his post. If we write to his successor, we must comply with numerous formalities, and a stranger would insist on knowing why we did not pay at the proper time. Well, if you take the money, I expect you can straighten things out."

Larrinaga looked hard at him, and Wyndham smiled. He imagined the fellow was not honester than other government officials he had met on the Caribbean. Larrinaga knew it was in his power to keep back as much of the sum as he liked for his private use and would, no doubt, do so. In fact, the fellow would imagine he was offered a bribe. Since one does not give bribes for nothing, Wyndham must hint that he had an object, and the hint must be plausible.

"Then you expect no particular privileges?" Larrinaga remarked.

"Oh, no," said Wyndham. "All we want is to carry on our business without the small officials bothering us. We are not smugglers, but we would not like the vessel stopped if a manifest now and then is not properly made up. One must go in and out when the tide serves, and sometimes we do not know what goods we have on board until we check the tallies when we get to sea. If we find we have cheated the customs, you can trust us to put things straight.

Only, we would sooner deal with somebody important; yourself, for example."

Larrinaga's eyes twinkled. "Very well. I think I can promise you will not be bothered much." He paused, and resumed in a thoughtful voice: "I expect you know your trading at the lagoon just now may lead to trouble?"

"All trade is troublesome, particularly when it is carried on in the mangrove swamps," Marston interposed. "The lagoon is not much worse than other spots. Anyhow, the profits are large and we must earn some money."

"But Señor Wyndham stated that you are rich."

"Rich people are sometimes greedy," Marston rejoined with a touch of awkwardness. "I did not begin business with the object of losing my capital."

Wyndham thought he would leave Bob alone. Larrinaga would not suspect him of plotting and his rather obvious embarrassment was an advantage. Bob was the man one would expect to be embarrassed when engaged in trying to bribe a government officer to sanction his smuggling. For all that, Wyndham gave Larrinaga a keen glance. The latter leaned back carelessly and rolled a cigarette. His movements were firm and quick.

Don Ramon was clever and knew much about the bush. It was possible he knew Wyndham had supplied the Bat with goods and he might mean to let him do so for a time while he took his bribes, hoping to cheat both by giving them a feeling of false security. Wyndham, however, did not think Don Ramon knew the Bat was his relation; Peters knew, but he was not

the man to share a secret he had thought worth much. Although one must not altogether take this for granted, Wyndham could not see another plan.

"Very well," said Larrinaga when he had made his cigarette. "I will take your money and see you are not bothered." Then he looked hard at Wyndham. "I will give you a hint: wait until your cargo comes down and do not go far from the beach. The bush is dangerous for strangers just now."

"We heard something about this," Marston replied. "I don't like the *Mestizos,* and if they're plotting trouble, hope you'll put them down."

"My partner has a horror of the swamps," Marston remarked with a smile. "If he was not keen to earn some money, he would not enter the lagoon. He has not joined me long and wants his friends to think he has a talent for business."

Larrinaga shrugged and got up. "The English and Americans are hard to understand. If I were rich, I would be satisfied to lounge about the plaza and now and then gamble at the casino with my friends. I would not gamble with the *Mestizos* in the swamps. The chances are too much on the side of the banker there. Well, I wish you good luck until we meet again."

The others went with him to the gangway and when the launch steamed off Marston sat down and looked about. It had got dark but a half moon drew a sparkling track across the calm sea. Anchor lights swung languidly by the shore, and in the background the white town shone with a pale reflection against the dusky hills. Music came off across the water with the rumble of the surf, and the smooth swell

splashed softly against the vessel's side. Presently Marston turned and looked to the east.

"One feels an English steamer's a bit of England. She takes civilization and decency where she goes; but it will be different to-morrow when we board *Columbine*. I wish our job was finished and we were going the other way. Anyhow, it must be finished, and I don't know if I liked the line you took. Don Ramon won't hand over all the money."

"It's possible," Wyndham agreed. "Still I think you urged that we must begin by paying the duties we had dodged."

"I wanted them paid to the Government, not to a corrupt official who thinks he's got another bribe. The duties belong to the country."

"Oh, well. I don't know a channel by which the country would get its dues. All are leaky; in fact, they are meant to leak. It's significant that official salaries are small. However, I don't expect Don Ramon is dishonester than the rest. Some of the money will go where it ought."

"Perhaps it's not important," Marston said thoughtfully. "All the same, you rather let the fellow think we wanted to smuggle."

"Smuggling's profitable. It was prudent to hint we had an object for haunting the lagoon. On the whole, I imagine a frank statement that we were trying to be honest would not have satisfied Don Ramon; one must make allowances for the other fellow's point of view. I hope he is satisfied, but I doubt."

"He is not a fool," Marston remarked. "I expect he reckons we mean to supply the Bat with things he needs to fight the Government. If he's

not altogether corrupt, why does he let us go on?"

"It's not very plain. Anyhow, I imagine he won't let us go on very long. In fact, speed's important. We must finish the job before we are stopped."

"The rebellion must be stopped," Marston agreed. "In a way, I don't care who rules the country; I expect nobody would rule it well. All the same, I'm not going to see white traders murdered and the swamp-belt given up to a cruel brute who would rule it on the African plan."

"The Bat can't start his rebellion without supplies, which we don't mean to give him," Wyndham said dryly. "Things would be easier if he were not my uncle."

Marston hesitated. "This bothers me most. D'you think Larrinaga knows?"

"I think not. Peters knows, however, and when he finds out where we've gone I expect we'll soon have him on our track. This means we must reckon on three antagonists."

"Three?" said Marston with a puzzled look.

Wyndham nodded. "I expect we'll find Rupert Wyndham the worst. However, I see one advantage; none of the three knows our plans and all theirs clash. We are not up against a combine."

"We haven't a plan," Marston objected.

"Oh, well," said Wyndham. "Since that is so we must trust our luck."

He went off and Marston smoked a cigarette and mused. He had wanted to be open and honest, but since they could not use force, he admitted reluctantly that they must intrigue. The job did not look as simple as he had thought in England; it was getting

obvious that Rupert Wyndham would be their worst antagonist. The fellow was, so to speak, no longer a white man; he was a savage with a lust for cruelty and power, but he had a white man's intelligence. To imagine he could be persuaded to give up his ambitious plans was ridiculous; he had no moral sense to which one could appeal. All the same, it was unthinkable that they should let him be captured by Larrinaga and shot.

Marston could see no light and presently threw away his cigarette and got up. The job was awkward, but he must not own he was beaten before he had begun. He would go on and trust his luck. In the meantime, he had promised to play cards with some passengers and he went to the smoking-room. They played until the electric light went out, when Marston found he had lost five pounds. It did not look as if his luck was very good.

In the morning, the steamer sailed and when she stopped again as dark fell a boat was hoisted out. High land loomed, vague and blue, against the sunset, drifting mist hid the beach, and not far off two masts and a dark hull cut against the hazy background. As he went to the gangway Marston looked back with a curious feeling of regret. The steamer stood for much that he liked and knew, and he had enjoyed the society of her officers. Their temperament was sane and practical. They did not seek strange adventures; theirs was a healthful struggle against the obvious dangers of the sea.

In front, all was different, and Marston could not see where his path led. Mystery, and perhaps horror, deepened the gloom through which he must grope his

way, and his face was grim as he went down the ladder. He did not talk while the sailors rowed him to *Columbine,* and leaving Wyndham to give the crew some orders he sat down on the gratings by the wheel.

The dew was falling and the deck was damp. Moisture dripped from the masts and ropes, and it was very hot. The anchor light tossed against the portentous gloom of the land. The yacht looked old and dirty, though Marston knew her strength and speed; the half-naked crew made no noise as they stole about. Their dark skin was scarcely distinguishable and Marston thought they rather looked like ghosts than men.

In the meantime, the steamer's boat was pulling back. Marston saw her move across the dim reflections on the water, but the splash of oars got faint and by and by she vanished in the dark. Then a whistle shrieked and lights that twinkled in the distance began to move. The throb of engines traveled far, but it presently died away and all was quiet. Marston was launched on his adventure, and since he was practical, he went below and studied the chart.

CHAPTER II

MARSTON GETS A WARNING

IT was dark and the mud village was strangely quiet. Thin mist drifted about the house Don Felix had occupied, and Wyndhams' new agent leaned forward slackly with his arm on the table. He was a young French creole, but his face was pinched and careworn.

Marston, sitting in a corner, studied the man. When he last saw Lucien Moreau he was vigorous and marked by a careless confidence. Now his glance was furtive and sometimes he fixed it on the window. There was no glass and the shutters had been left open because the night was hot. Marston remembered Don Felix's disconcerting habit of looking at the window when it was dark. The miasma from the swamps had obviously undermined Moreau's health; but Marston doubted if this accounted for all.

Moreau had been talking for two or three minutes when Wyndham stopped him.

"I understand you want to give up your post?" he said.

"That is so," the other agreed. "For one thing, you do not need an agent when you are closing down your business." He paused and gave Wyndham a sullen look. "Besides, I have had enough."

"Your pay is good."

"Good pay is of no use if one dies before one can spend it," Moreau rejoined.

"Very well," said Wyndham. "If you have had

enough, we must try to let you go. However, since your engagement runs for some time, you must stay a month."

Moreau agreed unwillingly and Wyndham asked: "Have you sent for the fellow who gave us our last load?"

"He is coming to-night. You will stay until he goes?"

"Of course," said Wyndham, smiling. "I don't want to put too much strain on you. It looks as if you were afraid of your customers."

"I am afraid. One is always afraid here," Moreau admitted. "It has been worse since you did not send the goods you promised."

"We will send no more," said Marston firmly and they talked about something else until they heard steps outside and a man came in.

He was a big, dark-skinned fellow and carried a thick blanket folded across his shoulder. His feet and the most part of his thin legs were bare, his chest and arms were powerful, and he looked truculent. He glanced at Marston curiously and then turned to Wyndham.

"Have you brought payment for my goods?" he asked in uncouth Castilian.

"We have," said Wyndham. "Señor Moreau has a list of the cargo and we will begin to unload in the morning. Tell him what we have brought, Don Lucien."

Moreau did so and the other frowned. "These things are of no use to me."

"They are standard trade goods that count as money," Wyndham replied.

"You know what we wanted," said the other and added, meaningly:

"In this country, it is not prudent for a stranger to disown his debts."

"We are not cheats," Marston rejoined. "The stuff is all good, but we are willing to pay in money."

Wyndham stopped him and turned to the mulatto. "If you are not satisfied, send your master. We do not dispute with servants."

Moreau looked alarmed, as if he thought the reply would provoke the other, but Wyndham gave him a peremptory glance, and he said a few words in Castilian. The mulatto smiled, a rather cruel, knowing smile.

"One needs courage to dispute with the Bat. It is not often people in his debt want to see him."

"All the same, we want to see him."

"I doubt if he will come. The custom is to send a present and ask leave to visit the Bat; but I will take your message."

"And what about the goods?" Wyndham asked.

"I can do nothing until I get an order."

"Then we'll send them up the creek and put them in the store. You can let them remain or take them, as you like. We have paid our debt."

"I doubt," said the other grimly and with an ironical salutation went off.

Marston felt relieved when he had gone, and soon afterwards he and Wyndham walked through the silent village to the creek. There were no lights, the quietness and gloom were disturbing and Marston noted that the negroes had not left the boat. He thought

they were glad when Wyndham told them to shove off.

"We have made our first move. I expect you don't see the next," he said.

"Not yet," Wyndham agreed. "It depends on our antagonist. I think he'll understand our challenge, but it's going to be an intricate game."

Marston lighted his pipe and tried to think about something else. He hated intrigue and liked to see his path. It was a relief when *Columbine's* lights began to twinkle in the mist, and he went to the cabin when they got on board. The little room was very hot and no air seemed to pass the gauze beneath the skylight, but the glow of the brass lamp was comforting. He owned that he had begun to fear the dark.

Next day they unloaded cargo and when they stopped in the evening Marston took his gun and went off in the dinghy. The tide was near its lowest ebb, the uncovered mud banks gave off a sickly smell, and for a time Marston pulled languidly down the channel. Then he saw a strip of firmer bank, where a little path came out. A creek flowed through the wet forest not far off, and he thought he might find his way across; the ducks fed at twilight in the pools in the swamps. Pulling up the dinghy, he looked at his watch. The tide had not turned, there was a moon, and it would not be very dark. One got cramped on board the yacht and he wanted exercise.

The path was faint and the ground wet, but it bore his foot. Here and there a huge cottonwood towered above the jungle, which was choked by fallen branches and fresh growth that sprang from the tangled ruin of the old. Knotted creepers strangled

slender trees and pulled each other down to the corruption that covered the boggy soil. Green things rotted as they grew; parasitic plants drained the sap from drooping boughs. One sensed the pitiless savageness of the struggle for life, in which the beaten were devoured by the survivors before they were dead.

Dark water that smelt horribly oozed through the jungle, the mosquitoes had come out, and Marston pulled down the veil fastened to his double felt hat. The forest daunted him, there was something about it that one felt in a nightmare, but he was tired of loafing, and pushed on. If he could reach the creek, he might get a shot. By and by, however, the path bent back towards the lagoon, and he stopped at the edge of a channel that crossed his path. It was not wide, but looked deep and the banks were very soft. The creek he meant to reach was farther on.

Marston considered. The channel marked the edge of the forest, which it followed for some distance and then, turning, ran obliquely to the lagoon. There was a muddy flat on the other side where he thought ducks might feed, and he did not want to turn back. All the same, he did not like the bridge that spanned the channel. Somebody had thrown a small trunk across and stayed it, as a suspension-bridge is stayed, by creepers partly pulled down from neighboring trees. The log looked rotten and the rounded top was wet with slime. The water obviously covered it when the tide was full. Marston, however, was sure footed and steadying himself by the bent creepers, went cautiously across.

When he reached the flat the sand and mud were soft and his step got labored, but the light was going,

he heard ducks, and thought he might get near them in the gloom. They flew off, and he followed some curlews that led him on for a time and then vanished with a mournful cry. Marston stopped and looked about. He had gone far enough, the tide had turned, and it was getting dark. Dark came quicky at the lagoon.

Across the little channel, mangroves rose from sloppy mud. Their roots were five or six feet high, and mudfish splashed in the holes beneath. Crabs crawled about the roots, for he heard their claws scratch on the smooth bark. He knew the noise; one heard it on board the schooner when the tide was low, and Marston hated the hideous mangrove-crabs that swarmed about the lagoon. They were savage and not afraid. If one sat on the sand, they crawled over one's body and their bite was sharp. A curlew's wild cry pierced the gloom and then all was quiet.

Marston frowned. Now the light was going, the forest looked sinister. Perhaps he was imaginative, but his half-conscious shrinking had some grounds. In the tropics the woods were hostile and sheltered man's enemies, of which the insect tribes were perhaps the worst. They attacked in hosts, with poisoned jaws. Then a pale glimmer caught Marston's wandering glance. The tide was creeping across the mud.

He went back and stopped at the bridge. Dark had fallen, but the moon was above the jungle and its light touched the channel. The log ran across like a thin black bar, a few feet above the slime. It looked frailer than when he had come. He braced himself, and balancing carefully, went a yard or two along the trunk. Then he heard a crack and seized the creeper

as the log dropped under his feet. He held fast, although the strain on his arm was sharp. There was a splash, the creeper broke, and swinging back with one end, he dropped in the mud. It rose to his knee and for a minute or two he splashed and struggled furiously. Somehow he got out and floundered back to the bank he had left. He was breathless and rather surprised to find he had not dropped the gun, but the arm by which he had hung was horribly sore.

Then it dawned on him that he was on the wrong side of the channel and could not get across. When he fell into the mud he was not far from the bank, but he had gone deep and it was unthinkable that he should venture farther out. The half-liquid mire would suck him down. Still the tide was rising and he could not stop on the flat. After a few moments, another thing struck him; when he crossed, the bridge, although narrow and slippery, was firm, but now it had given way as soon as it bore his weight. The log had slipped down, or broken, suddenly. He wondered whether it had been meant to break. A few strokes with the cutlass the half-breeds carried would be enough, and he could not have struggled out had he dropped where the mud was deep.

Marston clenched his fist and raged with helpless fury. He was persuaded somebody, with devilish cunning, had set the trap for him. When the tide rose the dinghy would drift up the lagoon and in the morning the yacht's crew would find her stuck among the mangrove roots. It would look as if he had landed on a mud bank and had stopped too long. Then, with an effort, Marston pulled himself together. He must search for a place where the bottom was not so soft.

He ran across the flat, heading for the lagoon and hoping he might find a belt of firm sand that would enable him to wade across, but there was none, and by and by he came to the main channel. It was wider and he saw clumps of weed and flakes of foam drift past. The tide was rising and would presently cover the flat. He went back as near as he could get to the jungle, and sitting down with the gun across his knees, took off his shoes. He had sometimes gone wild-fowling on the English coast and knew one can pull one's naked foot out of mud where one's boot would stick. The gun might be an embarrassment, but he meant to keep it to the last, because the fellow who had cut the bridge might be lurking about.

Treading very cautiously, Marston tried the bank again, but began to sink and had some trouble to regain the flat. It was obvious that he could not cross, and he doubted if he would be much better off if he reached the mangroves some distance from the path. The tide flowed back among them, their trunks were slender, and they were haunted by poisonous insects and the horrible crabs. If the crabs attacked him when the tide rose and he was forced to cling to the trees, he could not beat them off. All the same, he could not swim to the schooner.

For a time he wandered up and down the flat. Although he saw no way of escape, he could not keep still. In the end, he must swim, but he meant to wait until the tide drove him off the flat. There was not much use in swimming when one could not find a spot to land. The rising water presently forced him back to the small channel, where he stopped. The moon had got bright and although, for the most part, the

mangroves on the other side rose like a dark wall, the silver beams touched their branches here and there. Marston searched them keenly, because he had a strange feeling that somebody was about. Perhaps the fellow who had cut the bridge had stopped to watch him drown.

He thought he heard a soft rustle, leaves moved, and throwing the gun to his shoulder, he pulled the trigger. The barrel jerked, the sharp report rolled across the woods, and leaves and twigs came down; but that was all, and Marston, swinging the gun, pulled the other trigger. Then as the echoes died away he thought he heard a distant shout and a regular throbbing noise. He paused as he pushed in fresh cartridges, and listened hard. The noise was like the splash of oars and got louder. It was the splash of oars, and a shout came across the water again. Marston fired another shot and then waited, trembling with the reaction. Wyndham was coming for him on board the gig and the crew were pulling hard. They would reach him before the tide covered the flat.

When the sand was all but covered, the boat grounded close by and Marston got on board. Wyndham gave him a nod and Marston noted that he was hot and breathless. A heavy oar he had thrown down lay in the sculling notch.

"The boys went out to make fast a warp and saw the dinghy drifting up," Wyndham remarked. "We reckoned we had better start."

"Thanks!" said Marston, who imagined his comrade did not want to talk just then. "Have you got a cigarette?"

They shoved off and when they reached *Columbine* went to the cabin. Marston mixed a cocktail.

"There's enough for two," he said. "I expect you sculled pretty hard."

"I did," Wyndham admitted. "The boys shoved her along handsomely; looks as if they liked you, but the tide was rising fast. Well? What were you shooting at?"

"I imagined it was at the man who sent the dinghy adrift."

"Ah," said Wyndham, "I wondered — didn't think you'd carelessly stop too long. In fact, I was pretty anxious until I heard the gun. But do you reckon somebody did push off the dinghy?"

Marston stated his grounds for believing this, and Wyndham, after pondering for a few moments, looked hard at him.

"Well, I suppose you see what it implies?"

"I'm in the way. Somebody meant to get rid of me."

"Yes; but that's not all," said Wyndham, with a dry smile. "It looks as if I'm not thought dangerous; the man we're up against is not persuaded my reform's sincere. On the whole, this may be an advantage. To puzzle your antagonist is good strategy."

He drained his glass and lighted his pipe. "In the meantime, we'll let it go. What about the new running gear? Have we enough manilla rope for the peak-halyards?"

CHAPTER III

WYNDHAM TRIES PERSUASION

THE moon had not risen and thick mist drifted past the schooner before the hot land-breeze. Marston was talking to Wyndham in the cabin, but stopped when something bumped against the vessel's side.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

"A canoe, I think," said Wyndham, and both listened.

Marston wanted to run up on deck, but did not. Since his adventure on the flat had rather shaken his nerve, he meant to use some control. For a few moments they heard nothing and then the sliding hatch rattled, as if somebody pulled it back. Marston thought it significant that none of the crew had challenged the stranger. The hatch opened and the old mulatto came down. He did not squat on the deck, as he had done before, but sat, like a white man, on the side locker.

"Give me a drink; you know my taste," he said, and Marston noticed that he spoke good English.

Wyndham gave him some old brandy and he drank with leisurely enjoyment. Although he wore ragged and dirty cotton and his legs were bare, it was obvious that Rupert Wyndham had now done with pretense.

"I'm your guest," he said to Wyndham. "Perhaps it's not good manners, but I'd sooner Mr. Marston left us alone."

"Bob's my partner; I think we'll let him stay," Wyndham replied. "All that interests me interests him."

Rupert shrugged. "It looks as if you had given him your confidence."

"He knows who you are."

"Oh, well!" said Rupert. "You sent for me. don't know if I approve the form of the invitation you gave my servant."

"Something like *lè Majesté?*" Wyndham suggested.

"Something like that," said Rupert with a touch of dryness. "After all, I'm king *de facto* in the bush."

"Then I think you ought to be content," Wyndham rejoined. "The republic is forced to challenge a king *de jure.*"

Rupert looked at him with half-closed, bloodshot eyes, and Marston thought his face was now like a negro's. After all, his civilized talk and manners were a mask; the fellow was a negro underneath.

"We'll talk about this again," he said in a careless voice. "You seem to have got scrupulous since you went home. Is it a prudish girl's influence or your partner's?"

"My wife's, for the most part. If you take it for granted that I agree, it will clear the ground."

"Ah,"— said Rupert, frowning, "it looks as if I were foolish when I helped you to marry. Perhaps I forgot — it's long since I studied things from the white man's point of view and women don't count in

the bush. They are toys and don't make rules for their lovers."

"Unless human nature's different in the jungle, I expect some do so," Marston remarked.

"Their end is generally sudden," said Rupert, with grim humor. Then he turned to Wyndham. "I promised to make you rich. Have I cheated you?"

"No. In a sense, you have kept your promise; but, for all that, I was cheated. My reward vanished when I got it."

Rupert gave him a mocking smile. "Sometimes it happens so, but this is your affair and we will not philosophize. You made a bargain and got the goods, for which you must pay."

"I'm willing to pay. We have brought a load of stuff that has a standard value in the bush. If this won't satisfy you, I've paid a sum to your account at my bank. You can draw it when you like."

"Neither plan will do. I don't want trade rubbish and money is not much use. I need the goods I expected you to bring. If you refuse to supply me, you miss a chance you will not get again."

"I'm not sure that to seize the chance would be a very sound speculation," Wyndham rejoined in a thoughtful voice.

Marston looked hard at him. Harry's manner almost hinted that he was hesitating, but this was unthinkable. Rupert, however, smiled.

"You are a tactful fellow! You want me to state things plainly in order to persuade you? Well, I will be frank, and if I can banish your scruples, so much the better. We are relations and ought not to be enemies ——"

Rupert paused for a moment or two and then went on: "I sent you rare goods — that sell for high prices in England, but so far I have not sent you the best. There are plants in the swamps for which doctors and chemists would give very much. A few of my people know where they can be found, but I am perhaps the only man who knows how the essences can be distilled. After all, I am not a magician for nothing."

"There is not much modern chemists do not know," Marston interposed.

"Your manufacturing chemists have not got the plants," said Rupert dryly. "The finished product is scarce and valuable; I have the knowledge that can bring the raw material to the distilling retorts. Well, if I use this knowledge, I make my charge, and I have offered my nephew a generous share."

"On some conditions, to which I can't agree," Wyndham rejoined. "Your secret is worth money, but you can use it in one of two ways. You mean to smuggle the stuff into England in small quantities at a monopoly price; I think the other line would pay you better. Ship all you can, develop the trade openly, and although the price will drop and you may have rivals, the sums paid will be large and you will be first on the ground."

Rupert gave him an ironical smile. "You are rather obvious, Harry. You want me to come out of my seclusion and engage in conventional trade. I see drawbacks. In six months, English, American, and German buyers would overrun the country, touting for business. The country's mine and my people will not let white men get control. We are satisfied with

the old rules and don't want tram-roads, clearings, and factories. In fact, we don't mean to be exploited for the advantage of Larrinaga's greedy politicians, who'd sell the foreigners trading privileges for bribes."

He stopped and drained his glass, and there was silence for a minute or two. Wyndham understood his uncle and rather sympathized. Independence and liberty to follow one's bent were worth much; one would not change them carelessly for the commercialism that gave a man no choice but to work by rule or starve. Marston, however, was puzzled and presently remarked:

"Clearings would let in some light, which the country needs."

"The light your industrial civilization gives is dim. I and the others would sooner have the dark. You hate the shadowy world because you do not know it; I have lived in it long."

"How have you lived?" Marston asked. "You are a white man and it's plain you have unusual gifts. Yet you're satisfied to skulk about the swamps in dirt and rags, cheating superstitious brutes by conjuring tricks! The thing's unthinkable."

Rupert looked at him with the smile Marston hated. It was malevolent and mocked his philosophy.

"Some of the tricks are clever; they have puzzled you. We will not argue whether all are tricks or not. Anyhow, the clever impostor is a common type. Men who claim magic power direct your company-floating and manipulate your politics; but perhaps it's among primitive people the fakir has most influence. In the bush, I'm high-priest, and something of a prophet."

"You claim to be king," said Wyndham, very dryly.

"Prophecy's not difficult when you rather trust to knowledge your disciples haven't got than inspiration. No doubt, you make lucky shots, but royalty's another job. An unacknowledged king must fight for his crown. I want you to think if you hadn't better give it up."

Marston, looking from one to the other, felt the crisis had come. Both were calm, but he thought Harry was highly strung. Their glances were strangely keen; they looked like fencers about to engage. Marston reflected that Rupert did not know Harry's new plans; nor did he know Peters meant to meddle.

"Well," said Rupert, "suppose I agree? What have you to offer?"

"Much, I think. Your return to civilized life and the place where you properly belong. However, we'll be practical. You can resume the partnership in Wyndhams' that is really yours. I'll give you any just share to which Bob will consent, and we'll use your knowledge as far as we can do so lawfully. Our business could be extended and the house ought to prosper in our joint control."

Rupert laughed. "You offer money! In England, it would buy no power I have not got, and the things I like I have. We'll let this go. You are my nephew and perhaps you feel you must be generous; but don't you think you're rash? Have you forgotten the years I've lived in the dark? Habits stick. It would be embarrassing if your relation used the manners of a savage, and I have idiosyncrasies that would give fastidious people a nasty jolt. Then, since you have

married, what about your wife? Women are rather strict about conventional niceties."

"My wife agrees," Wyndham replied, incautiously.

"To your plans for my reform? Then, you have some plans. You are, so to speak, missionaries. Well, I imagine Marston is fitter for the job. His confidence can't be shaken, and he doesn't bother about the other fellow's point of view. The successful missionary is a fanatic."

"Give the thing up," said Marston, with some sternness. "You're white, you're English! Come out of the mud!"

Rupert shrugged and turned to Wyndham. "Your partner's staunch, but does not use much tact. Can you see me ordering smart young clerks, talking at an old men's club, and amusing your wife's friends in a conventional drawing-room? If so, your imagination's vivid. I can't see myself." He laughed, a harsh laugh. "In the bush I rule with power that nobody challenges."

Wyndham made a sign of resignation, and Marston owned defeat. After all, he had not expected to persuade the Bat. Then the latter resumed:

"You refuse to supply the goods I need?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you stay and keep your agent at the village?"

"Moreau will not stay long," said Wyndham, and Marston, seeing where Rupert's question led, wondered how Harry would account for their haunting the lagoon.

"We came to trade," Wyndham went on. "Al-

though I now see it won't pay to keep an agent, we must clear off our stock of goods."

"You can't do so without my leave."

"I doubt this," said Wyndham. "Anyhow, we're going to try. It's obvious you have some power, but a firm rule generally provokes opposition and we may do some business with the dissatisfied."

Rupert looked hard at him. "You may find the experiment dangerous. On the whole, my servants are staunch and know the advantage of keeping out foreigners. Well, this is your affair, and since it's plain we can't agree, I won't stay."

He got up and while Marston studied him with a touch of horror he seemed to change, as if he shook off the superficial civilization he had worn. His lips got thick and stuck out; they looked strangely red and sensual. His eyes got dull and the colored veins were plainer, and he rubbed one bare foot with the other's flexible toes. Marston felt he had reverted to the old mulatto.

"You go dash me them bottle?" he said with a grin.

They let him pick up the bottle of brandy, he climbed the ladder, and the hatch slid back. There was no noise on deck and they did not hear a paddle splash, but they knew he had gone. Marston drained his glass and looked at Wyndham, whose face was rather white. He saw Harry had got a jar, and said nothing.

After a few moments Wyndham broke out: "At the last, he looked a half-breed. A trick of pushing out his lips and stretching his nostrils, perhaps; but one feels he is a half-breed. I think he will never really be a white man again. He gave no hint of regret for

all that he has lost; it was rather horrible to see he was content."

"He is content, he has done with civilization," said Marston quietly. "We must remember this."

Wyndham nodded. "From now, we have not to deal with Rupert Wyndham, but with the Bat. To some extent, it makes the job easier. All the same, we can't give him up to Larrinaga. It's unlucky we could not have kept him on board."

"That was impossible. Your asking him to come implied that he was safe. Besides, we were forced to try persuasion first. Well, we have tried. What's the next plan?"

"I have none. We must wait."

"Do you think he was satisfied with the grounds we gave for stopping? I mean, do you imagine he believes we merely want to trade?"

"I don't know," said Wyndham moodily. "Perhaps I made a lucky shot when I talked about our trading with the opposition. I imagine it touched him; looks as if there was an opposition. Then I don't suppose he knows Peters is on our track and his. Well, in the meantime we must use patience and trust our luck."

He went up on deck and Marston went to bed. For a time he heard Wyndham's restless tread on the planks above him, and then he went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

WYNDHAM FINDS A CLEW

A FEW days after Rupert's visit to the schooner, a quantity of cargo arrived. The goods were not valuable, but the owners were satisfied with the payment Wyndham told his agent to offer and Marston was surprised they had got a load at all.

"It's strange," said Wyndham thoughtfully when they lounged under the awning while the negroes unloaded the canoes. "Of course, the Bat may have allowed the stuff to come down, for reasons that are not very plain. On the other hand, it's possible some of the half-breeds don't yet own his rule. Since this might be important, I'd rather like to know, but don't see much chance of our finding out."

Marston noted that Harry called Rupert the Bat, but he agreed. Rupert was no longer a white man. All the same he was Harry's relation.

"I imagine our chance of finding out anything useful here is very small," he rejoined.

"Then suppose we take the cargo across for transshipment and see if we can pick up a clew at the other end?" Wyndham suggested. "If we knew something about Larrinaga's plans, it might help."

Although the schooner was not half-loaded, Marston agreed. Any excuse was good that took him away from the lagoon, and at noon next day *Columbine* went to sea. The voyage to the white town was short and

on the evening of their arrival Marston lounged contentedly on the arcade in front of his hotel. A full moon shone above the flat roofs, the hotel was lighted, and the glow from the windows touched the pavement beyond the pillars. Citizens, enjoying the cool of the evening, crowded the streets, and sometimes stopped at the small tables to drink a glass of wine. On the opposite side of the street, the straight-fronted houses threw a dark shadow. The band of the *cazadores* regiment played on the plaza.

Wyndham was talking to a gentleman from whom his agent bought goods. Don Luis came to town to gamble at the casino, and Marston had met him before.

"You must come and see my *finca*," he said. "There are ducks on the marsh and you English are fond of sport."

Marston said he would be pleased to go if they stopped long enough; and then letting Wyndham carry on the talk, watched the passers-by. After a few minutes, a big muscular negro entered the belt of light, and Marston glanced at him with some surprise.

"There's Pepe!" he exclaimed.

He doubted if the negro heard him through the clink of glasses and hum of talk, but it looked as if he saw his quick movement, for he turned his head and went behind a group at a table.

"Somebody like him," said Wyndham carelessly, and when Marston looked back across the street the negro had vanished.

People moved about and Marston imagined he had retired into the gloom, where one could not distinguish him from the others. Pepe was the pilot at the lagoon, a good-humored fellow whom they had generally given

a small present besides his pay. As a rule, he did not wear much clothes on board, but he was now rather neatly dressed in white cotton and his hat was good. On the Caribbean coast, men spend large sums on their hats. It looked as if Pepe was getting rich, but Marston could not imagine why he did not want to be seen. He was going to talk about this when he caught Wyndham's eye and he lighted a cigarette.

"My partner is a good shot," Wyndham said to their companion. "We will be occupied for two or three days, but perhaps after that ——"

Don Luis fixed a day for their visit, and when he went off Marston turned to Wyndham.

"It was Pepe," he declared.

"Yes; I saw him. I think he was with the officer of the port-guard."

"But what is he doing here? And why did he step back when I turned to you?"

"I don't know," said Wyndham. "The thing's interesting."

Marston agreed, but he could suggest no explanation and they talked about Don Luis. In the morning, when the narrow streets got hot, they went to the *marina* where the sea breeze blew among the pepper-trees and palms. After lounging for a time on a shady bench, Wyndham indicated some carpenters at work behind the mole.

"It's too early to meet our agent. Let's see what those fellows are doing," he proposed.

They crossed a belt of shingle and found the carpenters mending a big open boat. Two or three other boats were drawn up close by and planks lay about. When Marston stopped, a man who had been sitting

in the shade got up and turned to him with a careless smile. It was Pepe, the negro pilot.

"Hallo!" said Marston. "Have you given up your job?"

"Not for long. One likes a change," the other replied.

In the meantime, Wyndham examined the boats. He knew the type, which was used for taking off cargo to vessels that did not come into the harbor. For their length, they carried a big load and were generally propelled by four men who pulled the heavy oars double-banked. Their flat bottom adapted them for use in shallow water.

"Are you going to buy the *candrays?*" Wyndham asked.

Pepe grinned. "One does not get rich by fishing and piloting. It is cool here in the shade and I have not much to do."

"Oh, well," said Wyndham, "No doubt you have seen the schooner. I expect we'll sail in about a week and we can give you a passage, if you are going back."

Pepe said he did not mean to return yet, and Marston and Wyndham went away.

"I wonder what he is doing about the boats, although I don't know if it matters," Marston remarked.

"He was rather obviously loafing."

"I'd have expected to find him loafing about a second-class wine shop."

"With a hat like his and new yellow boots?" said Wyndham dryly.

"They may have cost him all he's got. These fellows are vain. All the same, there's something strange about his being here and trying to pass without our

seeing him last night. He's frank enough this morning."

"He may have been making the best of it because he could not steal off before we came up."

"It's possible, although I don't see why he should want to dodge us," Marston replied, and added thoughtfully: "Since he's allowed to pilot vessels at the lagoon, I expect he's the Bat's man."

"Looks like that," said Wyndham. "I imagine he has been in Africa. Although his Castilian is not remarkably bad, the English he uses on board has the true West-coast twang. You might hear the words at Kingston, but the accent's good *Sar Leone*. However, if he's a friend of the Bat's, why was he going about with one of the President's port-guard?"

"Perhaps he met him at a wine-shop; they're both sailors," Marston suggested. "I thought you rather went out of your way to tell him we would sail in a week."

"An example of instinctive caution. It's possible we may sail before. In the meantime, we won't bother about the thing."

They went to the agent's office, and after transshipping their cargo set out one morning for Don Luis' *finca*. The road was bad, their horses were poor, and when they reached the big whitewashed, mud house their host persuaded them to stop the night. Dinner was served at four o'clock and soon afterwards Don Luis gave them fresh horses and they started for the marsh. It got dark while they floundered through the mud and reeds, but they shot some ducks as the light was going and stayed until the mosquitoes drove them off.

Going back, they took a road that crossed a steep hillside. Trees in dark masses rolled down the slope and thin hot mist drifted about the trunks. The moon, however, was full, and where there was an opening in the wet leaves bright beams pierced the gloom and made pools of silver light on the ground. A cloud of mosquitoes followed them and Marston's horse was fresh. He was not used to the big stirrups and wide Spanish saddle, and now and then found it hard to hold the animal. By and by, a regular throbbing noise came up the hill and he turned to Don Luis.

"It sounds like soldiers marching," he said.

Don Luis pulled up. "It is soldiers. A battalion of *cazadores* occupies the old mission. If we could go another way, it would be better, but there is no road up the hill."

The road was bad and narrow. There would not be much room for the soldiers to pass, and Marston imagined this accounted for Don Luis' wanting to turn off.

"They keep the troops a long way from the town," he said.

"The old mission makes a good barracks," Don Luis replied. "Besides, this is the President's own battalion. They are very loyal while their pay is regular, and made disturbances in the town, wrecking the wine shops where there was revolutionary talk."

They rode on and when the tramp of feet got louder, Marston asked: "Do the *cazadores* often drill in the dark?"

"Once they scarcely drilled at all," said Don Luis, laughing. "However, since Ramon Larrinaga became the President's friend they drill them much, with

German officers in command. Recently the drilling has got harder and one wonders why this is and whether it means something. All the same, I am a supporter of the President's and if he is satisfied — "

The measured tramp was now very close, and the creak of leather and rattle of straps and slings came out of the gloom. Marston thought he could hear the labored breath of men toiling up hill. Then a hoarse challenge rang out and his horse plunged across the road.

" Hold him! " said Wyndham sharply, and two or three men with glittering bayonets came into the moonlight that shone between the trees.

" A picket, or advance guard! " Wyndham resumed. " Get down, Bob. You mustn't let the brute go! "

Marston's horse reared and tried to turn from the shining steel, but he got his foot out of the awkward stirrup and swung himself from the saddle. The others dismounted and the soldiers led them off the road and then stood on guard.

" I do not know if we are arrested," Don Luis remarked with a shrug. " One must use patience; but I am not without some influence and expect apologies when the officers arrive."

When he had quieted his horse Marston lighted a cigarette and leaned against a tree. For a few yards the moonlight shone upon the road and when the first fours of the leading platoon crossed the illuminated belt he was surprised. The *cazadores* were short, dark-skinned men. Their sloped rifles wavered at different angles, and their march was slouching, but they carried complete field equipment; pouches, mess-tins, tools and bandoliers. It was the first time he

had seen the republican soldiers in regular marching order.

"Your government has been extravagant," he said to Don Luis.

Don Luis spread out his hands. "It is these Germans! Somebody will have to pay and the country is poor. Perhaps it is well to pay the soldiers, but one need not spend money on equipment until there is risk of war."

"Then there is no risk of war just now?" Wyndham interposed.

"I know of none. I cannot see why we should quarrel with our neighbors and although the negroes are turbulent in the back country, one leaves them alone. The Germans have led us into extravagance, señor. All must be efficient and worked on a plan! They do not understand us. We are not machines like them!"

He stopped, for one of the guards roughly ordered the party farther back into the wood. From their new position they could not see much. Sloped rifles tossed and wavered across the opening in the trees; steel bands and swivels shone in the moon, and one distinguished shadowy figures going by. After a time the measured tramp got fainter and rolled up the hill, and the beat of horses' feet came out of the gloom. The soldier who had driven the party back went to the road and his voice reached the others. Then he ordered them to advance and they saw two or three mounted officers in the moonlight. One sat stiff and motionless and asked a few sharp questions in uncouth Castilian, after which he turned to a companion.

"They say they are sportsmen and the fellow in the

cloak claims to be well known. The others look like foreigners. I will leave you to talk to them, Don Maccario."

"Ah," said Don Luis, "now the thing resolves itself!"

The other officer pushed his horse forward, and then laughed. "It is you, my friend! Well, perhaps we ought to make our apologies, but we are being trained on the German model and you are not as discreet as usual."

"Is one forbidden to look at the soldiers for whom, one must pay?" Don Luis asked.

"One is not encouraged, when they marched at night," the other rejoined dryly.

"I and my friends come back from shooting and there is no other road. What must we do? It is well known that I am a staunch supporter of the President's and a friend of Don Ramon's. However, you can see the ducks and our guns."

"It is not necessary. Do you know Don Ramon is at the mission? I think he means to breakfast with you to-morrow. But who are your friends?"

Don Luis presented Wyndham and Marston, and after greeting them politely the officer let the party go. They rode on down the hill and Don Luis grumbled.

"I am staunchly for the Government; the thing was ridiculous. I do not see why they hide our soldiers. It is some German plan. We will talk about it to Don Ramon if he comes in the morning."

When they reached the *finca* and Wyndham and Marston were alone for a few minutes the former said, "Perhaps it's lucky we came here, because I think I have found a clew. I expect you noted they tried to

keep the drilling and equipping of the President's battalion a secret."

"It looks like that," said Marston. "Still I don't see what it implies."

"For one thing, it implies they want a small, highly-efficient, striking force. The force is obviously to be used. These fellows don't study efficiency for its own sake."

"But why don't they want people to know?"

"I think that's rather plain. There's an advantage in striking before your antagonist is ready, and the citizens of this country have some talent for political intrigue; plot and counter plot are always going on. I don't imagine the President altogether trusts his friends."

"Ah," said Marston, "I begin to see ——"

He stopped, and when Don Luis came up talked about the shooting.

CHAPTER V

DON LUIS' BREAKFAST PARTY

ONE got up early at the Finca Buenavista, and when they had been given some black coffee and a small hard roll, Wyndham and Marston went to a bench in the patio. The house was built in a hollow square and its occupants used the patio when the rooms were hot. One wall was pierced by arches opening to the kitchen and stable; outside stairs, balconies, and windows with green shutters, broke the straight front of the others. In places, purple masses of Bougainvillea glowed against the ochre wash, and beyond the flat roof a steep hill, darkly green with foliage, rolled up against a background of distant mountains. In the middle of the square a pepper tree stretched its thin branches across a marble fountain, in which shining water splashed. The *finca* dated back to days when the country prospered under Spanish rule.

Wyndham lighted his pipe and looked thoughtful when he began to smoke.

"If Larrinaga is curious about us, he will come to breakfast," he said. "Since I think we can take this for granted, we had better choose our line."

"Why do you think he is curious?" Marston asked.

"To begin with, I doubt if he's persuaded our object for stopping at the lagoon is to carry on an ordinary, lawful trade. We have some grounds for imagining Peters has not told him the Bat is my rela-

tion; but I expect he knows we could not get much cargo without the Bat's consent. Then it's possible he has heard about our examining the boats, and now we are found watching the secret maneuvers of his troops. It's pretty obvious whom they are to be used against."

Marston nodded. "I've been pondering this. They could put three or four platoons of *cazadores* on board the old gunboat and land them where they are wanted in the cargo lighters. In fact, if it was fine weather, the Government's tug could tow them all the way. That's why Larrinaga brought the pilot over. The question is: what ought we to do about it? Do you mean to warn the Bat?"

"Not yet," said Wyndham, thoughtfully. "If he got warning soon enough, he would probably be able to make a good fight. Although I don't imagine he could win, a number of the soldiers would be killed. We don't want this."

Marston agreed. Their business was not to take a side. Indeed, it was unthinkable that they should help either party. All the same, he was puzzled, because since they could not allow the Bat to be captured and shot, something must be done. After a moment or two, Wyndham resumed:

"I have a half-formed plan. We must find out where the soldiers will land and when they'll start. Then we must get across before them and take the Bat the news while they are marching through the bush. It will not matter if his spies bring him word a few hours sooner. This will bear out our tale; but our arrival must be carefully timed."

"Yes," said Marston and pondered.

Harry's plan was vague, but on the whole it was

good. The Bat must be taken by surprise, without time being given him to organize a defense. Then he might be forced to surrender, not to the soldiers but to his relation, and they must try to smuggle him on board the yacht. The scheme, however, needed to be carefully worked out.

"You are reckoning on his not being ready to fight," he said.

Wyndham gave him a curious smile. "That is so. You ought to see why he is not ready, because, to some extent, you are accountable. Negroes and half-breeds, armed with cutlasses and a few old guns, can't stand up against well-drilled troops. The Bat has been embarrassed by not getting the material he expected us to bring."

"Of course," said Marston awkwardly. "Well, how are we to find out when the troops will sail?"

"I don't know. So far, we have been lucky; we must trust our luck again."

"Suppose all goes as you expect, and the Bat sees a struggle would be useless and gives himself up to us? What are we going to do with him?"

"That's perhaps the worst puzzle," said Wyndham dryly. "We must try to solve it when it comes. It's possible, however, the Bat may solve it for us."

Marston smoked for a time, glancing sympathetically at Wyndham, who knitted his brows. Then Bob said, "To begin with, we have got to bluff Larrinaga and he is not a fool. How do you mean to satisfy him?"

"On the whole, I think I'll leave the job to you," Wyndham replied and his eyes twinkled when he saw Marston's surprise. "Don Ramon's a good judge of character and would think a little embarrassment on

your part rather natural. You're not the stuff romantic conspirators are made of, and our being partners will imply much. However, there's a drawback; he mustn't think I have cheated and am using you."

"Then, I'm to look simple and trustful, but not altogether a fool. You give me a hard part. I doubt if I can play it," Marston grumbled.

"You mustn't try to play a part," said Wyndham firmly. "Be frank where you can, but don't talk too much. There's a thing may help us; Don Ramon will be careful not to hint our seeing the boats and the soldiers in field equipment is important."

"Oh, well," said Marston gloomily, "I'll be glad when breakfast's over."

About eleven o'clock two servants began to spread a table under the pepper tree, where the shadow of a projecting balcony stretched across the broken flags. Soon afterwards, Don Luis, looking hot and slightly disturbed, entered the patio with Larrinaga and a thin, dark-faced gentleman who wore plain white clothes. Marston, however, noted that his hat and silk belt were remarkably good, and thought he had somewhere seen his portrait, only the man had then worn a handsome uniform. Bob got up as the strangers advanced and Wyndham, taking off his hat, gave him a quick glance. Marston felt he was warned to brace himself.

"My poor house is honored to-day," Don Luis remarked. "Our illustrious President will breakfast with us."

The President smiled urbanely and Don Luis presented his guests. Wyndham saw and frankly returned Larrinaga's twinkle, but he felt some strain and hoped Bob would take the proper line. If, as he

thought, he understood Don Ramon, the latter had, perhaps, hinted they would sooner breakfast unceremoniously in the patio; Wyndham afterwards found this supposition correct. The stage was, so to speak, properly set. The light was strong and a row of windows commanded the table. Nothing indicated plot or secrecy. The party would meet without reserve and engage in careless talk.

"I did not know his Excellency was at the mission, or I might have ventured to offer him hospitality," Don Luis remarked when the President was served.

"Nobody knows," said the latter, smiling. "Now and then I neglect my duties and steal away from town. I can trust my officers, when they do not know I have gone. A President has some cares and perhaps deserves a holiday. Besides, I like to watch my soldiers' drill."

Wyndham imagined the President had thought it prudent to account for his visit to the mission, and admitted that the statement was plausible. He said that so far as he could judge, the *cazadores* were excellently drilled.

"I understand it was dark when you saw them," the President replied. "However, if soldiers interest you and I am not recalled to town, you and Señor Marston must come and see them at the morning parade."

"I hope we did not break your rules last night," said Marston. "Perhaps I ought to have pulled up sooner, but my horse was fresh and got out of control. Then I was not used to the saddle and stirrups. I do not ride much."

"Señor Marston is a sailor, what the English call a yachts-man," Larrinaga interposed. "For him,

sport means the sea. His taste is strange, but some of his countrymen are like that. If I were rich, I would sooner amuse myself at the casino."

"Then our friend is rich?" the President remarked. "But I remember — these gentlemen paid some duties our officers neglected to collect. It is a thing that does not often happen in this country. Since Señor Marston is both rich and honest, he has my felicitations. However, we owe him and Don Luis some apologies." He turned to the others. "I hope you were not treated roughly, but our new officers are very strict and use all military caution."

Wyndham laughed. "We make no complaint. But surely even a German officer could not imagine three or four men with shot-guns meant to attack a battalion of soldiers as brave and disciplined as yours? We would much like to see them in the daylight."

"If I am allowed to stop at the mission, we will fix a time," the President said graciously.

"Is not the mission an awkward spot for a barracks?" Wyndham asked. "It is a long way from the town and the road is bad."

"It is lonely and quiet. Ours is a small country and we have jealous neighbors. One must take precautions, but, since spies are numerous, it is not prudent to display our readiness to fight. When one wants peace, one does not go about with a fine new pistol in one's belt."

Wyndham agreed. The President's explanation was plausible and his humorous frankness calculated to banish doubt, but Wyndham was not deceived. Moreover, he thought Larrinaga was watching him. Larrinaga's object for bringing the President was

plain; he wanted his master to see the men he had allowed to trade at a spot where the Bat would try to get supplies. Wyndham felt that he and Marston were being closely examined. Then the President turned to Marston.

"Since I am told you came from Africa in your little ship, it looks as if you are a keen sailor."

"I love the sea," said Marston, simply. "There is no other sport like sailing."

The President shrugged, and pushing back his plate, gave Marston a cigar.

"It is a love that needs cultivation. When I go to sea I am very ill. Then one understands you others have comfortable yachts. To go to sea in a trading boat is another thing."

"All the same, one is at sea," Marston replied. "Besides, in a sense, a yacht is a toy, and when you have sailed about for a time you begin to feel it is playing and does not lead to much." He paused and resumed apologetically: "Yachting is not serious, if you understood. I expect my Castilian is very bad."

The President smiled and Wyndham thought his look of puzzled amusement was well done. He was satisfied with his comrade's reply. Bob was not playing up; he was sincere. The others would recognize this.

"The English are a serious people," the President remarked. "But go on, my friend. I am not bored."

"Well," said Marston, "when I got tired of playing, I saw how I could make my yachting useful. I thought I could earn some money. Then Harry, I mean Señor Wyndham —" He stopped and gave Wyndham an apologetic glance.

"He means he wanted to help me," Wyndham interposed.

"To earn money is certainly useful," the President observed and turned to Wyndham. "Your partner is a very scrupulous gentleman; he would not rob me and feels that he must use his talents. But you do not go to sea altogether because you like it?"

"I am a merchant and live by trade. I am forced to earn money."

"Then I hope you will earn enough to pay us our duties and I expect Don Ramon will help you when he can," said the President. "I am sorry we have no ships to show Señor Marston, because we are too poor to build a navy yet. We have an old gunboat and a big new tug. I do not know why we bought the tug, but the captain of the port-guards uses her to travel about the coast."

He paused and got up. "Now I must go back to the mission. If it is possible, you shall see our soldiers, and if not, I may perhaps come to see your ship."

Larrinaga and Don Luis went off with him and Marston drained his glass.

"That's done with!" he remarked with keen relief. "After all, it was easier than I thought, but I got a knock when I saw the fellow was the President. Don Luis is a staunch supporter of his and perhaps he imagined breakfasting with him would be a cheap reward. Presidents and such people do things like that."

"It's possible, but I doubt," said Wyndham dryly.

"Then suppose he came to study us? Do you think he feels we might be dangerous?"

"I imagined he feels he needn't bother about you. I'd much like to know what he thinks about me."

"Oh, well," said Marston, "he didn't push me hard and I got a part I could play. I'm on firm ground so long as I can talk about boats. All the same, when you come to think of it, if the fellow wanted to study us, the thing's ominous. The country's not big, but he's its head and I don't know if Presidents are often polite to traders."

"Exactly!" said Wyndham. "We must be careful. Anyhow, we have found out something. They don't want us to think they suspect us, or that their drilling the soldiers is important. They're clever, but their frankness was overdone. However, we must start for the port when Don Luis returns."

CHAPTER VI

A SAIL IN THE DARK

COLUMBINE'S gig rubbed against the landing steps and Wyndham and Marston lounged about the end of the mole. The sun had sunk behind a high, black range and the land-breeze had begun to blow in gentle gusts that crisped the greasy water and dropped again. When the crew were trimming ballast in the hold, a man shouted that some chain Wyndham had ordered had arrived, and he and Marston pulled the gig to the steps. After putting the chain on board, they strolled to the town, where they drank a glass of wine and bought a newspaper; and then went back to the mole. For the last few nights they had slept on board, but it was early in the evening and the top of the wall was cooler than the deck of the yacht. Besides, a Spanish liner was steering for the port and they waited to watch her passengers land.

Presently Wyndham looked up from the newspaper. "It's lucky we bought the *Diario*. It declares the report that the Sta Catalina mission was recently plundered is not confirmed."

"Isn't that Father Sebastian's station?" Marston asked.

Wyndham nodded. "A few mud huts, and a small, thatched church! Still, it belongs to a famous Order and pious folk no doubt sent gifts, because the *Diario's* remarks indicate that the Virgin's jewels were supposed

to have been stolen. If this is true, the thing's significant. The most part of the people here are pretty staunch Catholics."

"But the newspaper states the report is *not* confirmed."

"It is not denied," said Wyndham, meaningly. "I imagine the Government had given the editor a hint. You see, the desecration of a church by negroes would rouse the citizens' feelings and lead to a popular demand for swift punishment. If the President complied, the Bat would know about it, and the republicans would lose the advantage of surprise. All the same, they must strike soon, because the Bat will now get ready."

"Then, why do you think he let his people rob the mission?"

"I don't think he did so. Perhaps some were too keen and got out of control; perhaps some meant to force Larrinaga to put him down. They're a treacherous lot and given to intrigue. However, there's another bit of news. The gunboat, *Campeador,* has gone into Anagas, damaged, after stranding, and will need extensive repairs. I expect this is true, because folks at Anagas could see the boat."

"It's important," Marston declared. "If the gunboat's damaged, Don Ramon can't use her to carry his troops. Still I suppose the Government tug could tow them along the coast on board the lighters. They are overhauling her at San Cristobal. Looks as if we had better find out when they'll finish the job."

Wyndham nodded. San Cristobal was some distance off; a small town with a good harbor, where there was a foundry and a coaling wharf. Yet it would be

dangerous to make open inquiries about the tug or to visit the place, because Wyndham had grounds for imagining they were watched. Indeed, one of the port-guards was lounging near them. When a whistle screamed he looked up and saw the liner circle outside the mole. Foam broke about her side as the screw turned astern, a row of lights flashed into brightness, and big electric hatch lamps blazed up on deck. She stopped, the anchor splashed, and the doctor's noisy launch went off. Then the yellow flag came down and shore boats crowded about the ship.

It was nearly dark when the returning boats pulled towards the mole. A steamer was anchored near the entrance, and *Columbine* rode between her and the wall, leaving a narrow channel through which the boats must pass. When the first was close by Wyndham glanced carelessly at the passengers, but after a few moments his glance got fixed. Among the row of faces there was one he thought he knew and as the boat drew level with him he clenched his fist.

"Look at the third man in the stern-sheets, Bob," he said.

Marston looked and started. "It's Peters! This is going to make things awkward. The brute has lost no time. D'you think he knows we're here?"

"He knows *Columbine*," said Wyndham. "I imagine he sees her." Peters turned his head and his movements indicated that he was talking to the sailor who rowed on the thwart in front.

"That is enough," Marston remarked. "He'll try us again in the morning, and if we're firm, he'll see what he can do with Larrinaga. We are going to be firm. I won't buy off the brute."

"Then we had better get to sea, but we must find out about the tug before we start. On the whole, I think we'll get about it now."

Marston was surprised. "San Cristobal's a long way off, and I don't know if we could hire horses. Then I doubt if we could return by noon to-morrow, and one of the port-guards might board *Columbine* in the morning. Larrinaga would guess our object if he found out where we'd gone."

"Exactly," said Wyndham. "We can't go by road, but the gig is here and we'd shorten the distance by sailing across the bay. In fact, if we're lucky, we ought to have an hour or two to look about and then get back by daybreak. The land-breeze will soon blow fresh; a fair wind both ways."

"By George!" said Marston. "The thing can be done!"

Running down the steps, they pushed off the gig. She was a well-built boat, twenty feet long, and on the African coast Marston had got a Fanti carpenter to fit her with a centerboard. She carried a big sail when she had a crew on board, and now the heavy chain would make good ballast. When they had got a compass, a lantern, and some food from *Columbine,* they pulled off among some shore boats going to the liner, and vanished into the darkness round her stern.

"If the port-guard saw us, he'd reckon we meant to board the mailboat, but it's possible he didn't pick us out from the others," Wyndham remarked. "Well, the breeze is freshening. Let's put up the mast."

They were occupied for some minutes, and then Wyndham sat down at the tiller and the gig, leaning over, gathered speed. Marston had had the lugsail

and jib made in England by a famous yacht-chandler, and the boat was fast. Foam piled up at her lee bow, lapped the gunwale at her waist, and boiled round her stern. The breeze came down in gusts from the high land, and now and then the boat, listing sharply, shipped some water. Wyndham might have avoided this by slackening the sheet, but he held on to the rope and kept his course. Although the night was dark, he could see the hills against the sky and for a time he followed the coast. Then, when the shore curved back in a wide bay, he told Marston to put the compass on the thwart and light the lantern.

"Get out the baler and bucket, afterwards," he said. "There's room enough for the wind to knock up the sea, and she'll take some water on board as we reach across. Time's valuable and we must hold her to it, without shortening sail."

Marston crouched behind the lifted weather gunwale and lighted the lantern; then he saw that halyards and sheets were clear, and afterwards pulled up the well-board in the stern flooring. Sitting down with the baler in his hand by the hole, he waited and looked about. The sea began to break as they drew out from the land. Showers of spray beat into the hollow of the jib and the splashes that blew across the weather bow got heavier. The wind was not, as they had hoped, abeam, but a point or two ahead, and Marston lowered the centerboard, which jolted in its trunk when she plunged. She was not shipping much water yet and he wondered whether he could light his pipe. Then Wyndham said, "Look out!"

A white comber rose to windward, there was a thud, and jib and short bowsprit vanished. A white cloud

hid the mainsail and foaming water flooded aft. As he used the baler Marston heard the sheet-blocks rattle. Wyndham was easing her while he threw the water out. It was hard to fill the bucket because the flood washed to and fro, but he knew the job was urgent. He was wet and breathless when he looked up.

"A nasty one!" he gasped.

"Here's another," said Wyndham, and flying water whipped Marston's face.

After this he was kept occupied. Sometimes he used the bucket and sometimes the baler, for water came on board fast. Now and then he imagined Wyndham slackened the sheet to ease a plunge that might swamp the boat, but this was Harry's business and he must not neglect his. Balancing himself against the lurching, he scooped up the splashing flood. When a gust heeled the boat over it gained on him, and then as the pressure slackened he held his own, but while he used his best efforts he could not bale her dry. At length, when his arms ached and he was very wet, he stopped for a few moments.

"Don't know if I can keep it up for long; I'm horribly cramped," he said. "Can't we drop the lug and tie in a reef?"

"I doubt if she'd hold her course with sail shortened," Wyndham replied. "The breeze has drawn another point ahead and we'll lose time we can't spare if we're forced to tack. Stick it out, Bob. We'll get smoother water when we pick up the land again."

He stopped and jerked the tiller, a moment too late, for a sea came over the bow. The water foamed about

Marston's knees, the lantern went out, and he thought he felt the compass strike his legs.

"Bale!" said Wyndham, sharply. "She'll capsize if she ships another before you get this lot out."

Marston did his best, while the lantern and compass washed against the bucket. There was no use in stopping to pick them up, since he could not get a light and Harry was now steering by the wind. He must keep her as near it as she would point until they crossed the bay and found the land again. Marston hoped this would be soon. For some time he did not look up and afterwards wondered how Wyndham kept her afloat, but at length the plunges got easier and the water did not come on board so fast. By degrees, he got it under, and stopping to stretch his cramped limbs, looked to windward. The sea was smoother and the breeze not so fresh. There was a vague dark line not far off and he knew they were approaching the beach.

"We'll be round the point in a few minutes," said Wyndham. "Bale her dry, and then look out for the red light at San Cristobal."

Soon after he stopped baling, Marston saw a red twinkle. The gig was sailing very fast, swaying down and recovering buoyantly as the gusts came and went. The lug-yard bent in a strained curve and showers of spray blew into the sail. Marston, stooping behind the gunwale, managed to strike a match and told Wyndham the time when he had looked at his watch.

"We have made a good run, but she'll beat it going back, when we'll have the wind a point or two aft," he added. "This ought to give us an hour, or perhaps an hour-and-a-half, at the port."

"It will be enough. Unluckily, the tide is ebbing yet, and although there's not much rise and fall, I don't know if we can both leave the boat. It would be awkward if she grounded and we couldn't shove her off."

Marston nodded. The gig was heavy and he doubted if they could launch her down a beach. It would be risky to tie her to landing steps, because the port-guards watched the harbors at night. Vessels were not allowed to enter after dark. Yet he did not want to be separated from Harry.

In the meantime, they were fast coming up with the light, and when a high, dark wall ran out in front Wyndham luffed the boat and they lowered sail and took down the mast. Marston sculled her past the wall, and the narrow harbor opened up. A few anchor lights swung languidly inside, and the indistinct, dark shape of a steamer shut out part of the wall. When they got near her Marston stopped sculling.

"The repairing slip is up at the top by the foundry," he said. "I expect the brigantine to starboard has a rope out. If we try to get across, we might make a splash. If we go the other side, we'll pass close under the steamer's rail. She's a pretty big boat; they'll have a *Sereno* on board, and keep harbor watch. If somebody hailed us, it might bring the port-guard."

Wyndham nodded and for a few moments they looked about. The harbor was long and narrow. For the most part, the town at its end was dark, but two or three big electric lamps threw a silver gleam across indistinct masses of foliage. Marston thought these were trees on the *marina* at the water's edge. If so, the faint light lower down came from the office of

the port-captain. Turning to the wall abreast of the gig, he imagined he saw some steps.

"Perhaps you had better land me and wait while I try to find the tug," he said. "I ought to get back in an hour."

"The awkward part is going along the mole," Wyndham replied. "You'll have to pass two or three vessels and somebody may speak to you. This must be risked one way, but instead of coming back, it might be prudent to cross the land end of the mole and join me on the beach in front of the *marina*. There's not much surf to bother us, but it will make some noise and if anybody is about you won't be heard."

Marston agreed, and sculling to the steps, jumped out. He pushed off the gig, and Wyndham picked up the oar. In another few moments the boat vanished in the dark.

CHAPTER VII

THE TUG

WHEN he had climbed the steps Marston stopped. Now he had started on his adventure he saw its difficulties. To begin with, he must pass two or three vessels, and the lights that burned on the steamer touched the mole. She came from Cadiz and Spanish passenger boats carried a *Sereno,* whose particular duty was to keep watch at night. Marston was afraid the man might hail him. Although he had laboriously studied Castilian, he did not speak it well, and his accent would indicate that he was a foreigner. If the *Sereno* were curious and kept him talking, the port-guard might come up. Anyhow, there was some risk of his meeting the latter and he would then be asked to account for his wandering about in the dark. It was obvious that he could not do so satisfactorily, and there was a telephone to the Government office at the Capital.

Marston doubted if Larrinaga could imprison him for spying, but it did not matter much. If he were found at San Cristobal, Don Ramon would know his object and would not let him go until he had sent off his soldiers to put down the Bat. If the latter were not warned, he would probably be surprised and captured. This was unthinkable, and Marston saw he must not be caught, although to run away from the port-guard might lead to his getting shot. The fel-

lows carried pistols, which they were empowered to use. Caution was plainly needed, and he crept past the steamer, keeping close to the high parapet of the mole.

Nobody hailed him, and he went on until he came opposite a small marque. She had no lights, but as he stole by his foot struck a mooring rope and he fell. He lay flat on the ground for some moments, and then, hearing no movement on board, got up and crept away, looking out for the next rope. The mole was long and he had not gone far when he heard the splash of oars. A boat came out of the dark, and a break in the wall indicated a row of steps. Marston did not want to turn back, and it was possible the men were going to one of the vessels. If they were going to the town, he had better get past the steps before they landed. A pile of goods forced him to leave the gloom of the parapet and it looked as if his figure cut against the sky, for the splash of oars stopped.

"*Ola compañero!*" somebody shouted.

Marston saw he must trust his luck and asked gruffly: "*Que quiere?*"

The man said they were coming to let go a schooner's rope but he might throw it down, and Marston dragged the heavy warp to the edge.

"*Coje-le,*" he said in a hoarse voice and threw down the rope.

He imagined it fell upon the others' heads, for somebody said, "*Mal rayo! Esta borracho.*"

Then the boat pulled away and Marston went on. If the fellows thought him drunk, so much the better. This would account for his brevity and uncouth accent. He wondered whether the shouting had excited

the port-guards' curiosity, but although he stopped to listen he heard nothing.

By-and-by he got near the end of the mole and distinguished the repairing ship, which ran down obliquely to the water. The trees on the *marina* rose behind it, touched in places by the glow from two big electric lamps, and a blurred, dark mass cut against the illumination. This was, no doubt, the tug and he wondered, rather anxiously, whether the crew were on board. Stopping where the gloom was deepest, he looked carefully about.

The tug's bow rose high above him, but he doubted if the tide had left her stern. So far as he could feel with his feet, the stones were covered by broken shells, and he smelt paint. In the tropics, the bottom of an iron vessel soon gets crusted with shells and weed, and it looked as if the crew had scraped the boat. When the plates were clean they would paint her with red-oxide before applying the anti-fouling coat. It was important for him to find out which they had put on, because, since they could only work at low-water, this might mean a difference of a day or two in the time needed to finish the job. All the same, he could not take it for granted that she would be ready for sea when the last coat was dry. He understood her engines were being overhauled, and must ascertain if the work were done.

Marston moved lower down the inclined slip. The tug was a big propeller boat and rested, upright, on heavy shores. When he was level with the engine-room he saw a ladder against her side and his foot struck something that tinkled. Stooping down, he felt about and found a number of short tubes, some of

which had torn ends. They had obviously come from the condenser, and re-tubing a condenser might be a long job. It looked as if he would have to get on board, but, to begin with, he had better see how far the men had gone with the painting.

He rubbed his hand along the plates. Although they were pretty smooth, this did not tell him much and he got no plainer hint when he used his nose. There was a strong smell of paint, but he could not tell if it was the priming coat, or the anti-fouling that would finish the work. Perhaps he could find the drum that had held the paint and he began to feel about as he moved down the slip. He had not gone far, however, when he trod on a piece of iron that tilted up and dropped with a sharp rattle. To continue the search might be dangerous and he stopped and listened.

All was quiet on board the tug; the trees on the *marina* tossed in the wind and the surf rumbled behind the mole. A clinking noise came up the harbor and Marston imagined the men whose rope he had thrown down were getting ready to go to sea at sunrise; vessels were not allowed to leave or enter port in the dark. This reminded Marston that it was some time since he had left Wyndham and they must reach the schooner before daybreak.

He went back up the slip, hoping he might be able to see the tug's deck. Now he was on higher ground, he noted a faint and rather puzzling illumination behind her bulwarks. Its position indicated that it came from the engine-room and he imagined the skylight was open but somebody had thrown a tarpaulin across the frames. The hinged lights opened from the bottom, and perhaps the engineer wanted to dry his paint and

yet keep the heavy dew off the machinery. Anyhow, since there was a light in the engine-room, one could see below.

Marston hesitated at the bottom of the ladder. It would be very awkward if he were caught on board the tug; but he must find out if she were ready for sea and he wore light, rubber-soled deck shoes. The ladder was not fastened, for the top began to slip along the plates when he climbed, and he was forced to reach up and seize the rail. Next moment he stepped cautiously down on deck. Nobody seemed to have heard him and all was dark but for the glow from the skylight, which only shone for a few feet on the damp planks. As Marston made for the engine-room his foot struck an iron drum and he stopped. It was a paint-drum, but he must discover if it were empty and what paint the crew had used.

He tilted the drum and its lightness indicated that there was not much inside. Then he turned it round carefully until he could see the brass label on the top. The letters were obscured by paint, but he distinguished JES — and was satisfied. He knew the famous anti-fouling composition; the crew had put on the last coat and, so far as her being painted went, the tug was ready for sea. Now he must look at her engines, and he put back the drum. Its rim jarred on the deck and Marston thought he heard a movement below. Stooping down, he looked under the tarpaulin and got something of a shock.

A man stood on the floor plates in the engine-room, with his face turned up towards the skylight as if he had been disturbed. Marston could not see him well, because the bars of the top platform were in the way,

but the fellow carried a small, bright piece of steel and a ball of waste. It looked as if he had been cleaning a valve-spindle, and his working at night was significant. Marston's heart beat, but after a few moments the other seemed to be satisfied and sitting down on a locker picked up a file.

When the fellow bent his head over his work Marston glanced carefully about the engine-room. He saw the condenser; the cover was on, which indicated that the repairs were finished. A chain tackle hung from the beams above the cylinders and some nuts lay about their heads. The pistons had obviously been lifted in order to put on new rings. Other things Marston noted implied that the engines had been given a thorough overhaul. He thought the work was nearly completed, but when one examined a vessel's engines the boiler was generally opened and he crept cautiously to the stokehold.

The ladder came up to a grating on deck and when he had gone down half way he struck a match. He could see the man-hole; the cover had recently been taken off and replaced, for smears of red-lead marked the joint, and Marston went cautiously back to the deck. He knew all he wanted to know. The tug had been put in first-rate order, as if in preparation for some important work, and he thought she could be floated off after another tide. He must now rejoin Wyndham as soon as possible. So far, he had been lucky, but when he went to the rail it looked as if his luck had turned.

A man, singing lustily, crossed the *marina* and his hoarseness implied that he was returning from a carouse. As he passed the port-captain's office some-

body hailed him and Marston heard him answer, "*Fogonero.*"

There was a short colloquy that seemed to get abusive, and then somebody said, "*Vaya al diablo!*"

The man laughed and came on unsteadily towards the mole. He was a ship's fireman, and Marston, who did not want to meet him, hoped he was not making for the tug. After a few moments he fell down and Marston thought he kicked something savagely when he got up. His figure was now faintly distinguishable and it was plain that he meant to board the tug. Marston crawled round the skylight and crouched against the bulwarks on the other side. A rope ran across the rail and he tried to feel if its end was fast. The rope might help him to reach the ground.

Then the awkward steps stopped at the tug and the ladder shook. Its upper end slipped and a noise below indicated that the fireman had fallen off.

"Pancho, Panchito!" he shouted. "Come out and help, little parrot!"

Marston heard the engineer clatter across the iron platforms and cross the deck. So far as Marston could understand, his remarks were grossly rude, but the other interrupted:

"What is a small bottle of *caña* to a fireman? It is the ladder that is drunk. If you will not hold it, little parrot, I must sleep in the cold."

To judge by the noise they made, Pancho seized the ladder while the other scrambled up. He jumped on deck, laughing boisterously, a door shut, and when the men's feet rattled on the platform bars in the engine-room Marston crawled across the deck. He found the top of the ladder, but had only gone down a few steps

when it slipped across the side and threw him off. Although he did not fall far, the ladder struck the ground with a crash and he lay down in the gloom under the tug's bilge.

After waiting for a few moments he saw the others were not coming back on deck, and he got up and stole along the slip. Crossing the mole with a few quick steps, he climbed the parapet and dropped to the stones on the other side. When he had gone a hundred yards along the beach he whistled softly, and although the gravel rolled about in the languid surf heard Wyndham's answer. Then the gig's white hull appeared indistinctly among the streaks of foam, and he plunged into the backwash as a wave recoiled. Seizing the gig's bow, he pushed her off and got on board while Wyndham sculled her round. For two or three minutes they let her drift off-shore; and then stepped the mast and hoisted sail.

"Well?" said Wyndham. "Did you find the tug?"

Marston related his adventures and added: "I expect they'll float her off next tide, but some of the small jobs I noted would hardly be finished. Then she'll have to coal, fill her tanks, and get up steam. In fact, I don't imagine she could start until sometime after dark to-morrow. Five or six lighters were lying near the slip."

"She'll no doubt bring them across," said Wyndham thoughtfully. "I expect the skipper will go half-speed across the bay. Well, suppose she arrives in the morning? The sea-breeze will freshen as the sun gets high, and towing the loaded boats would be dangerous in broken water; perhaps we can take it for

granted the troops won't leave until it's dark. At night they'd get smooth water, because the wind's off the land. This means we have about forty-eight hours' warning. But slack the jib sheet a little. Our first job's to get on board by daybreak."

As they opened up the bay the sea got rougher, but the wind was on the gig's quarter and they let her go. She rolled on the angry combers and the boom that stretched the lugsail's foot tossed up. If she fell off much and the sail lurched across, the shock would capsize her or carry away the mast. Wyndham, however, held her straight and she drove on, with curling foam piled about her side. It was a wild run and they were glad when they got near the land again and found shelter. The sea was smooth now, and the breeze moderate, although it blew in gusts that heeled the boat and set the water splashing against her planks. Once or twice Wyndham made Marston strike a match and look at his watch.

"We may get in, but we have not much time to spare," he said at length.

The breeze fell and the boat rose nearly upright. Marston put out an oar and began to pull, for when he looked east the sky was getting pale. The gig was sailing, but the splash at the bows was faint and at times the canvas hung slack. Half an hour afterwards they pulled down the mast and Wyndham took the other oar.

"A steady stroke! Don't force the pace. But you have got to row!" he said.

The need for speed was plain. The eastern sky was clearing and the mist began to roll back from the coast. Marston saw a belt of surf and shadowy rocks and

woods. Ahead, a light marked the harbor mouth, but it was some distance off and the gig was a heavy boat for two men to row. Yet they must reach port before day broke, and, gasping and straining, they labored on. After his hasty glance about, Marston saw nothing but Wyndham's back, swinging to and fro in front with a regularity that he must emulate. He felt the bow lift as he dragged the heavy oar through the water; then there was a faint gurgle, and his heart beat as he swung forward again. His hands blistered and the sweat ran into his eyes.

At length, Wyndham said something hoarsely and a high wall, washed by languid surf, rose above the boat. They were entering the harbor, but Marston dared not turn to look ahead. The light was growing and the wall would guide them to *Columbine*. He must not miss a stroke, because the port-guard might be able to see them now. Three or four minutes afterwards, Wyndham stopped rowing and said, "Easy! Let her go!"

Marston fell forward with his oar and fought for breath. His heart beat like a hammer, his arms and legs trembled, and he felt he had not strength to lift his head. Then the end of his oar struck something and they were alongside *Columbine*. Rousing himself with an effort, he leaned out and seized a rope. Wyndham got up and began to lift the mast.

"Find the compass and lantern; then help me put the gear on board," he said.

When the gig was empty of all but the oars they got over the schooner's rail and pulled off their wet clothes. In the tropics, white men, as a rule, do not bathe in cold water, but the galley fire was not lighted

and Wyndham filled a bucket over the side. The cool brine braced them, and going to the cabin, they began to take out dry clothes. Wyndham, however, stopped, as if listening, and Marston heard the splash of oars.

"Pyjamas, I think," said Wyndham. "Somebody's coming."

As they put on their pyjamas the oars stopped close by and a man shouted.

"One of us will be enough," Wyndham resumed. "Look as sleepy as you can."

Marston went up, with his pyjamas half buttoned, and leaned on the rail. It was daylight, for on the Caribbean dawn comes swiftly at about six o'clock. A boat carrying two men in the port-guards' uniform floated a few yards off. Marston thought they were looking at the gig, and he waited in keen suspense.

"A note from Señor Larrinaga," said one.

"Don Ramon gets up early," Marston remarked with a yawn, and when the man gave him the note added: "Wait a minute."

Opening the envelope he went to the cabin and said to Wyndham, "We are asked to breakfast at the mission and see the soldiers parade. I imagine we're expected to stop the day. Don Ramon is sending horses; they'll be ready in half an hour."

"Well," said Wyndham, "I suppose we must go."

Marston gave the men a bottle of *caña* and sent them off. Then he went back and sat down limply.

"If we had been ten minutes longer, they'd have found us out," he said. "I don't feel up to riding far, and their asking us to the mission now is awkward. Still I expect we couldn't sail until it's dark. It's lucky we got our clearance papers."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE MISSION

HALF an hour after the boat pulled away, Marston and Wyndham mounted the horses Larrinaga had sent. The mission was some distance off, but breakfast would not be served until about eleven o'clock and they rode slowly up the hill behind the town. Two soldiers followed thirty or forty yards in the rear, but Marston had found out that they knew no English. Wyndham was quiet and preoccupied.

"The horses are the best I've seen, and I suppose Don Ramon's sending an escort is something of a compliment," Marston said presently. "We are going to the mission like honored guests; I don't know about our coming back. Yet we must get back to-night."

"We calculated the tug would sail with the lighters to-morrow after dark and we need twenty-four hours' start," Wyndham replied. "It ought to be enough, if the breeze is strong; landing the troops will be a long job. However, we must not be late."

Marston agreed. Larrinaga was using every precaution to keep the dispatch of the expedition secret, and no doubt hoped to surprise the Bat. If they were too late, they might be captured with him. If, however, they brought him warning long enough beforehand, he might make a stubborn defense, and this would involve them in fresh entanglements.

"I'd feel happier if I knew the President's plans for to-day," Marston resumed.

"So would I," said Wyndham, smiling. "I imagine they will, to some extent, depend on the line we take. On the whole, his object for sending for us is plain; he wants to keep us away from the port as long as possible."

"If he thought we were spying for the Bat, he might lock us up."

"I think not. He would then have to inform the consul and state the grounds for our arrest. All the same, if he's not satisfied, he may tax us with cheating the customs or something of the kind and keep us until the tug has sailed. In the meantime, perhaps it's lucky we are not about the port, because I think Peters won't offer his help to the Government until he has seen us. If Larrinaga knew what Peters knows, we wouldn't reach the lagoon."

"I expect that is so," said Marston gloomily. "Well, it will be a big relief when all this intrigue is done with and we leave the coast for good."

For the most part they were silent until they reached the mission. The building was old and falling to ruin, but it had a touch of stateliness, for its foundations were laid when the Spanish conquerors were influenced by the austere beauty of Moorish art. The front was pierced by Saracenic arches that led to a cloistered walk on one side of the patio, from which an outside stair went up to the officers' rooms. The rest of the building was plainer and was now used for a barracks. Palms grew round the square in front and in the background dusky forest rolled back to the mountains that cut the sky. Two or three companies of *cazadores* were drawn up in the square.

The President and Larrinaga received their guests at

the central arch, where chairs had been put in the shade. There was another gentleman, whom Wyndham imagined belonged to the President's cabinet, and he thought the minister quietly studied him and Marston. It was possible Señor Villar had joined the party with this object. If so, it looked as if the others had not yet decided if they were dangerous or not.

"Now you have arrived, we will go on with the drill," the President remarked. "Afterwards, Señor Marston will tell us what he thinks about my soldiers."

"My opinion is not worth much; I am a sailor," Marston replied with some awkwardness, because he thought the President was amused.

"You are modest," the latter rejoined. "Well, we cannot ask what you think about our fleet. Our gunboat, the *Campeador,* has stranded, and this only leaves us the tug."

"I have seen the tug," said Marston, and stopping for a moment, went on: "A very fine boat! She looks powerful and ought to steam fast."

Wyndham wondered whether the others had noted Marston's pause. It was not long and perhaps his frank admission would satisfy them.

"Let us try to turn kilometers into what you call knots," said the President. "It is a complicated sum; you must help me, Don Ramon."

"About twelve knots," Wyndham interposed when they began the calculation. "However, you must not indulge my comrade by letting him talk about ships. We came to see the soldiers."

The President signed to an officer, who shouted, and the *cazadores* wheeled and formed on a new front. The bands and muzzles of their rifles sparkled in the

searching light and dust rolled about them as they moved. They were little, wiry men, and although they did not drill remarkably well and their white uniforms were not clean, Wyndham noted that their rifles were good. Moreover, their equipment was up to date and new.

The officer, shouting savagely, kept the men moving about, and when at length he dismissed them came back, hot and sprinkled by dust, with a look of disgust. Wyndham, allowing something for the German character, thought the disgust was rather marked.

"Then you are not satisfied yet?" the President asked.

"They are your Excellency's subjects," the other replied with a shrug. "I do my best, but we do not make much progress. Perhaps, with extra drill for two or three months ——"

The President laughed. "One must use patience, and in this country one goes slowly. Besides, I do not know if speed is needed." He turned to Wyndham. "Now we will leave you to Don Arnoldo for a few minutes. I promised Señor Villar I would examine the quartermaster's books. There are people who grumble about our military extravagance."

He went off with the others and the officer sat down. Wyndham imagined him a soldier of fortune whose main object was to earn his pay. For all that, it looked as if he had been given a part in the plot and had played up well.

"I expect you find drilling these fellows a tiresome job," Marston said in English.

"It is so," the other agreed. "The President is too ambitious; I think he wastes his money. His people

have no military feeling; they are stupid individualists and one cannot give them mass-consciousness. One might make them brigands, but not soldiers. Yet I think they would fight, and after all, the best school for soldiers is war."

"You don't want a war for the sake of drilling your men!" Marston exclaimed, and the officer laughed.

"In my country, we are no longer sentimentalists and I do not pretend to be humanitarian. In the meantime, there is no war, and I am satisfied to draw my pay. Playing with soldiers is expensive, and some of the people grumble, but so far the pay is regular. When it stops I give up my post."

Soon afterwards, the President came back and breakfast was served behind the pillars. For a time he talked to Marston about the soldiers and then remarked: "I understand you do not stop long."

"Our business is nearly finished and we expect to sail very soon," Wyndham replied. "Now our visit to the coast is over, I feel there is much for which we must thank you and Don Ramon."

"We hope your visit has been prosperous enough to bring you back," Villar interposed. "You paid us some duties. All foreigners are not so honest."

"I expect foreigners are something of a nuisance. It is strange, but when one goes abroad one feels justified in breaking rules."

Villar smiled. "This is illogical. Have you broken our rules?"

"Not many; my partner is scrupulous, and if I have given way to temptation, it was not from greediness."

"Then what persuaded you?"

"Perhaps it was British impatience with other people's regulations. In a way, we are rather an arrogant lot, and it flatters our self-importance to know that if we do get into trouble our Consuls will probably save us from the punishment we deserve. You cannot lock up a drunken British sailor without inquiries being made. Don Arnoldo's people are proud of their army, but our fleet is ubiquitous."

"Señor Wyndham is frank, although I doubt if he is just to himself," the President remarked with a twinkle. "I will confess it is sometimes hard to bear with foreigners philosophically, but we make the effort. My country is poor and we need the trade and money they bring. If we do not always love them, we make allowances." He paused and gave Wyndham a thoughtful glance. "There is, however, one thing about which we are firm; no stranger must meddle with our politics. It is our Monroe doctrine and is sternly enforced."

"A good rule," Wyndham agreed. "After all, your people do not need much help from strangers; they have some talent for political intrigue. How many antagonistic parties have you just now?"

"Six," said the President dryly. "They hate each other, but to gain an advantage all will combine against my Government. Moreover, in this country, the vote is not the only way of marking one's disapproval. But we will let this go. You will stop with us to-night and Don Ramon will give you some shooting when the evening gets cool."

Wyndham thought quickly. He had expected something like this and it was obvious that much depended on his reply.

"We ought to go back," he said, with pretended hesitation. "You see, we want to sail as soon as the wind is fair and must get water and stores on board. It might, however, help if you would let us leave port at night. The land-breeze would carry us some distance off the coast before it dropped when the sun got up."

"Very well," said Larrinaga. "I will send the port-captain orders, and if you tell him when you want to sail he will let you go."

Wyndham allowed himself to be persuaded, and soon afterwards the President went off and Larrinaga took them to a shady room. He said dinner would be served at four o'clock and then they would go to a lake and shoot. When he left them Marston looked at Wyndham.

"Why did you agree to stop?"

"I did not think there was much use in refusing. Their urging us to stop was an experiment. If I had insisted on going, they'd have known why."

"Then, d'you imagine they'd keep us by force?" asked Marston.

"It's possible. I studied the President when I made my boast about our British citizenship. He stated they would allow no meddling with their politics, and he meant this. Anyhow, if I'd shown him his suspicions were well-grounded, he would have found a plausible excuse for keeping *Columbine* in port."

"All the same, we have got to get away," said Marston in a resolute voice.

Wyndham nodded. "That's plain. Well, if we go to bed soon after shooting and are lucky, they won't miss us until somebody brings our early breakfast. I

don't know if we can get the horses. Now I'm going to sleep."

He got into a hammock and Marston lay down in a long chair. They had been strenuously occupied all night and did not expect much rest the next. Nobody would bother them until dinner, and although they were disturbed and anxious they went to sleep.

After dinner Larrinaga took them to a lake, where they shot some ducks. The President was occupied when they returned at dark, and for a time they sat on the arcade, playing cards. The cards were Spanish and Marston could not remember their value and the rules of the game. Mosquitoes hovered about them, the night was gloomy and very hot. Something in the still air made one strangely languid. Moreover, he was tired and anxious, and he did not feel much relief when Villar put the cards away and they began to talk.

Marston suspected the others' remarks were not as careless as they looked and might lead him to some awkward statements. It was like fencing with a clever antagonist when all one could do was to stand clumsily on guard. For the most part, he left the talk to Wyndham, and although Harry played up well, Marston thought the effort was difficult. He wondered whether their companions saw this. There was one comfort; in the tropics, people got up early and he imagined their hosts would not sit very long.

At length Larrinaga pushed back his chair. "Time goes and my duties begin at sunrise. Then I think you would like to make an early start?"

Wyndham said they must get off as soon as possible, and Larrinaga nodded.

"Don Arnoldo will give the necessary orders about

the horses. They belong to the soldiers and nobody else is allowed about the stable. I believe he posts a guard at night. The Germans are like that, and the mission is now under military rule. It has drawbacks, but the army is the President's hobby and we submit."

The officer laughed and said the horses would be ready soon after daybreak, and when the others went off Marston and Wyndham climbed the outside stairs to their room.

"Looks as if they meant to keep us. Don Ramon's hint was plain." Marston observed.

"It's lucky white men don't walk much in this country," Wyndham replied. "A *pasear* round the plaza while the band plays is about all the exercise people take, and I don't imagine anybody above the rank of a *peon* has ever walked from the mission to the port. In fact, it's very possible Don Ramon hasn't calculated that we might set off on foot." He paused and went to the window. "The night's dark but very calm. A noise would carry; we must wait for some time."

CHAPTER IX

COLUMBINE STEALS AWAY

ALL was quiet at the mission but for the soft rustle of the palms when a puff of wind came down the hill. The last light had gone out behind the narrow windows across the patio, and Wyndham, looking at his watch, got up.

"We must chance it now," he said. "If all goes well, we ought to reach the port two or three hours before dawn and our hosts won't miss us until the major-domo sends our breakfast."

Marston pulled himself together. The port was a long way off and since he had left England he had not walked much, but it was obvious that he must make good speed to-night. Opening the door quietly, they stole downstairs, carrying their boots, and stopped for a few moments in the gloom of an arch. It was very dark; the palms across the square hardly showed against the sky. There was a sentry on the terrace, but they could not see him and waited until they heard his measured steps.

When the sentry passed the arch, they crept out and started across the square. Small stones hurt their feet, but they went on as fast as possible, until they heard a soft rattle of leather and jingle of steel. The sentry had wheeled round at the end of his beat and was coming back, and they lay down on the sand and waited until the steps receded. They must reach the gloom of the trees before he turned again, and they pushed on,

listening hard. Marston's heart beat and his hands trembled as he clutched his boots. The measured steps stopped for a moment and then began to get louder, but Bob drew a deep breath when he distinguished the long branches of the palms overhead. Nobody could see him now.

A few minutes afterwards they set off down hill at the fastest pace they could make. The road was rough, one could not see the holes, and Marston was soon wet with perspiration. He had got soft in the tropics and his legs began to ache, but he thought he was going nearly five miles an hour. Since time was valuable, he must try to keep it up. He had no breath to talk and Wyndham said nothing; with clenched hands and eyes fixed straight in front they labored on. Half-seen palms went by, but in places the gloom was impenetrable, and now and then they fell into a hole.

By-and-by Marston's boot began to gall his foot. The smart got worse and sometimes he limped. When he did so, he dropped behind Wyndham, and setting his mouth tight he trod squarely. One could not walk fast on the side of one's foot; he must push on and bear the pain. It was ridiculous that he should lose time because his boot scraped his toe. Yet long afterwards he remembered the effort to keep up his speed.

When the first white houses of the town came out of the gloom his clothes were sticking to his skin and his wet hair was flat on his head. He stopped and sat down in a dusty gutter.

"I've got to take off my boots. There's a pavement of sorts," he gasped.

Wyndham nodded and looked about. The houses were indistinct and the sky was dark. He could not

see his watch, but he calculated it was about four o'clock and day would not break for two hours yet. Puffs of wind touched his wet face and he heard it in the trees behind the town. They were in time, but had none to waste.

"Be quick!" he said. "We're a mile from the harbor."

Marston got up and they set off. Straight and nearly blank walls now shut them in, for the houses got light from the patios. Wyndham's steps echoed in the dark, but except for this all was quiet. It looked as if nobody were about. A strange smell hung about the houses, for the street was narrow and the land-breeze did not sweep it clean.

By-and-by they crossed a square and kept back from a lamp at the end of another street. To meet one of the armed police would be awkward, for although the fellow's curiosity might be appeased by a bribe, to persuade him would occupy some time. They met nobody, but after some minutes Wyndham thought it prudent to cross the *alameda*, where shady paths wound among tall trees. The gloom would hide them and from one end a dark street ran down to the harbor. Marston agreed and set his lips as he struggled on, for the walks were covered by sharp, fresh gravel. Stealing along the dark street, they reached the mole and stopped for a moment. So far as they could see, the tug had not arrived, and although they distinguished *Columbine's* masts against the sky, she was moored to a buoy some distance from the wall. Wyndham had warned the crew to keep a watch, but there was a risk in hailing them.

"One of the port-guards is generally about this side of the harbor," he said.

They listened, but only heard the sea splash against the wall and the wind in a neighboring vessel's rigging. The land-breeze was fresh and blew down the harbor. If they could get on board, it would not be long before *Columbine* was at sea.

"We might swim," Marston suggested.

"I think not," said Wyndham. "There's a nasty, splashing ripple that would break in our faces; besides, the gig would be quicker. We must chance a hail."

He shouted and Marsten clenched his fist when no answer came. It was unthinkable that they should be stopped by the negligence of a sleepy look-out. Before long the port-guard would walk up the mole, and if they were not gone, would take them to the captain's office. One must get leave to go on board, because the port was closed at night.

They waited for two or three minutes, since Wyndham dared not shout again, and then a soft rattle came out of the dark. Marston started and thrilled.

"I believe that's somebody jumping into the gig," he said.

"It is," said Wyndham softly, and after a few moments added: "She's coming."

They could not see the boat and she made very little noise. There was no splash; it looked as if somebody sculled her cautiously. By and by a dark object glided out of the gloom beside the wall and they went to the steps.

"Go back softly, softly," Wyndham said to the indistinct figure in the stern as they got on board.

In a few minutes they reached the schooner and Marston's spirits rose. He had done with tracks and plots; now his job was straightforward. Moreover, he knew it well.

"I'll cast off the bow mooring," he said when Wyndham got on board. "Give me a line and you can haul the chain up quietly. It mustn't run through the pipe."

Shoving the gig forward, he jumped out on the buoy; then he unscrewed the shackle and, fastening on the line he brought, waved his hand. The chain slipped gently into the water and did not make much noise when the men on board pulled it up. *Columbine* was free now and had begun to drift when Marston seized her rail. He made the gig's painter fast and left her alongside, because the blocks on the Burton tackle would clatter if they tried to hoist her in. It was something to feel the schooner's deck under his galled feet. but there was much to be done before he could indulge his relief. Although they could not see the tug, she might have reached the port, and they must pass the three-mile limit before they would be safe. In the meantime, *Columbine* was drifting slowly down the harbor.

"We must chance hoisting the staysail," Wyndham remarked. "Get it up handsomely; stop if the chain clinks much."

The staysail had chain halyards and Marston sent a man aloft with a grease-swab. For all that, the halyard made some noise and the sail thrashed in the fresh breeze, until they hauled the sheets and Wyndham got her round. *Columbine,* with a small triangle of canvas set, stole down the harbor, and if the port-guards did not keep a keen look out, she might get away.

Marston, sitting on the bowsprit loosing the jib, watched the shadowy wall move back. They were passing the Cuban barque and she was not far from the end of the mole. *Columbine* moved faster; he heard the water ripple at her bows, and the beam of the lighthouse ahead got near. It was a sector light, screened on one bearing, and they could keep outside its illumination.

In a few minutes they would clear the end of the mole, and when the jib was loose Marston looked aft. Shadowy figures moved about the deck, getting the canvas ready to hoist. Not long since, he had doubted if they could steal out of the harbor. When one studied the plan coolly, it looked ridiculous, but they had tried and he began to hope they would succeed. Then he turned his head and thrilled as he saw the end of the mole slip by.

"Hoist the outer jib," said Wyndham when Marston joined him. "We must be cautious. The captain's launch has steam up and could catch us yet."

They got to work. The blocks rattled as the jib went up, but the wind blew the noise away. The splash at the bows was louder, and Wyndham waited, measuring the distance from the receding mole.

"Boom-foresail," he said sharply.

The tall dark canvas rose and swelled. *Columbine* began to list and trailed a white line astern. The mole faded and the light looked farther off.

"Mainsail next," said Wyndham. "Hoist handsomely."

The winch by the mast began to clink; the big sail shook and thudded while its slack folds blew out, and the Kroos started a wild paddling song. The tension

was over; they were running out to sea and nobody could hear them now. The song, however, soon got breathless; it was hard to drag up the heavy canvas while she was before the wind and Wyndham would not round her to. He braced himself against the wheel and steered off-shore for the three-mile limit.

They set the sail, and got more wind as they left the land. She rolled and foam ran level with her dipping rail. The long main boom lurched up and groaned; one heard the masts creak and the rigging hum. Her wake ran back into the dark like a white cataract.

"Hoist gaff-topsail," said Wyndham. "Trim the squaresail-yard."

Marston gave him a quick glance and then got to work. He doubted if the gear would stand the strain, but Harry knew the boat. Although the Krooboys looked surprised, it was obvious that they trusted him. It cost them a struggle to cover her with sail, and she drove along almost too fast to roll. A white wave stood up above her waist, another curled astern, and the hollow squaresail swelled like a balloon. Although the sea was smooth, water foamed on board and spray swept the deck in savage showers. The men crouched behind the bulwarks and when Marston went aft he got an exhilarating sense of speed.

"Do you want help?" he asked. "Can you hold her."

"I think I can," said Wyndham, with an exultant note in his voice. "We have sailed some hard races, Bob, but none for a stake like this. If the masts will stand, she must go to-night!"

Marston nodded. "Looks as if we ought to win! I imagine the tug is not in harbor and Don Ramon is

comfortably persuaded we're asleep at the mission. When he finds we're not, we'll be a long way off. I don't suppose they can march the troops to the port and embark them before it's dark." He paused and laughed when he resumed: "His promise to send the port-captain orders to let us go if we told him when we wanted to sail was clever. He knew, of course, we couldn't do so."

He sat down on a coil of rope and lighted his pipe. Now the long strain was over, a reaction had begun. His head was heavy; he felt very tired and limp. Showers of spray blew about and when he began to get wet he thought he would go to the cabin and study the chart. It was plain that they could not leave the schooner at the lagoon; besides a little mental exercise might rouse him.

When he lighted the lamp he found he could not see the small figures on the chart. His eyes and brain were dull, for two nights and a day of effort and suspense had worn him out. The coast-line, however, was clearly marked and indicated a number of bays and inlets. So far as Marston could remember, they were bordered by mangrove swamps with dark forest behind. Looking up at the compass, which was fixed in the skylight and allowed the glow of the binnacle lamp to shine through, he tried to calculate where Wyndham was steering. He could not fix the course within two or three points and presently gave it up. Then his head dropped forward, the chart fell on the floor, and sinking down on the locker cushion, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER X

THE BAT OWNS DEFEAT

AT daybreak Wyndham entered the cabin and wakened Marston. The latter yawned, stretched his arms, and glanced at the compass.

"It's getting light. I expect I've been asleep," he said. "Where are we heading?"

Wyndham picked up the chart and indicated a spot. "This bay. She has made a good run, although the wind has nearly gone."

"You know where to find the Bat, I think?"

"I have a notion," Wyndham replied, indicating another spot some distance from the coast. "But come up on deck. The sun will soon rise and I must try to get our bearings."

Marston went up. The wind had dropped and was now very faint. *Columbine,* carrying all the sail they could set, scarcely crept across the smoothly heaving sea. Ahead, a bank of mist hid the low coast; farther back, vague mountain tops rose against the pale sky. In places, rippling streaks lined the gray water. The picture had a strangely flat and lifeless touch that reacted on Marston. He felt dull, and shivered, although it was not cold. Turning to the galley, he saw a plume of smoke trail from the bent funnel.

"I'll get some coffee and then we'll talk," he said.

Coming back in a few minutes with a jug, he sat down on the stern-gratings.

"To begin with, can you hide the boat?" he asked.

"Not properly. There are one or two creeks, but they'd, so to speak, invite examination. On the whole, I'd sooner trust an open beach. *Columbine's* low hull and masts won't be very distinct against a background of forest. I'm steering for an anchorage behind some shoals."

Marston signed agreement. "Larrinaga can't keep the tug searching the coast; he'll send her back for supplies. I expect he knows how to reach the Bat."

"It's possible. He has spies and the German Colonel has, no doubt, made careful plans. There are two routes; east and west of the high ground, and I reckon he'll send the *cazadores* up in two columns. The first will probably try to get behind the Bat's position."

"Then, we'll strike one column's line of march," said Marston, thoughtfully. "In fact, since we must come back, we'll strike it twice."

"Yes. I see some advantage in this. Our taking their path won't matter when we go up, because we'll be in front, and we agreed that the time of our arrival is important. We must give the Bat just long enough to reach the coast before the soldiers turn back and cut us off. I expect it will mean our pushing across the hills for some distance. When we cross their line we'll be in front again."

Marston signified his agreement by a nod. It was plain that they must leave much to luck, and lighting his pipe, he leaned against the rail. As the sun rose the mist ahead began to melt. Wooded heights rose out of the streaming vapor and presently Wyndham found the marks he wanted and went off to sleep while

Marston kept his anxious watch. It was now nearly calm. Sometimes a puff of wind ruffled the water; sometimes the sails hung slack and the ripple at the bows died away. The sun got hot, the smooth swell shimmered with reflected light, and nothing indicated when the sea-breeze would begin.

The calm, however, would not stop the tug, and Marston pictured her steaming up from San Cristobal with engines thumping hard and the empty lighters astern. News of *Columbine's* departure had, no doubt, reached the mission; bugles would be calling and the *cazadores* strapping on their equipment ready to start. Still it was a long march to the harbor and Marston hardly thought the troops would embark before nightfall. If wind would come, Wyndham might keep in front of them, but in the meantime *Columbine* hardly moved. Marston wondered whether they ought to hoist out the gig and tow, although the labor would be exhausting and they could not make much progress.

A dark streak broke the glittering surface, a cool draught touched Marston's face, and the slack sails swelled. *Columbine* began to move, and presently gathering speed, listed over to the fresh sea-breeze.

After an hour or two, he wakened Wyndham, who got another bearing and changed the course. At dusk they steered for the coast and towards morning anchored behind a shoal. There was nothing but the background to hide the vessel and Marston knew the risk when they landed with four of the crew. In the steamy heat of the forest, exertion soon wears a white man out, and the negroes were needed to carry food and some shelter from the dew at night.

After dark on the second evening, they reached the Bat's headquarters, in the company of a gang of savage negroes. They were exhausted by the journey, their clothes were torn, and they did not know if the negroes were their captors or their guides. So far as one could see, the village looked mean. A few small mud huts stood among mahogany trees and big cotton-woods. There was no light in the huts, but a fire burned outside one, and although the night was warm, indistinct figures crouched about the blaze. They vanished and appeared again when the light leaped up, and Marston remembered the factory boys squatting round the fires in Africa. But the Kroo laborers sang, and these fellows were strangely silent. In fact, a daunting quietness brooded over the spot.

The Bat's hut was larger than the rest and a rude veranda occupied the front. There was no furniture except some mats and stools, and a badly-cleaned paraffin lamp gave a dim light. The Bat sat on a carved stool and wore a striped tennis jacket over his dirty white clothes. His legs and feet were bare; his lips stuck out and his nostrils were wide, and Marston felt that to fear and shrink from him was ridiculous. Yet he did shrink. Then he noted with some surprise that Father Sebastian occupied a mat in the corner. Next moment the Bat looked up with a mocking grin.

"Why you lib for my village? It d— poor place," he said.

"We'll explain that later," Wyndham replied. "In the meantime, why is Father Sebastian here?"

"I take care of him," said the Bat. "Fool black man rob his church." He paused and added with a cruel smile: "Them fool man pay."

Wyndham turned to the priest. "Will you give us a few minutes, *padre?* We will send for you soon."

Father Sebastian got up and the Bat nodded, as if he gave him leave to go. He went out and Wyndham sat down on a mat.

"Now," he said, "suppose you drop this negro mummery and talk like an Englishman. I want to remember you are Rupert Wyndham. No doubt you meant to keep the missionary for a hostage, but it's not important. I imagine you did not expect to see us?"

Rupert's face changed. Something of its coarseness vanished, his lips straightened, and he looked less like a mulatto.

"I did expect you. Anyhow, I heard white men were coming, although I could only account for one," he said and added with an ominous smile: "I sent to meet you because I did not want you to lose your way."

Marston knew that in Africa the negroes can signal news across the bush with remarkable speed. It looked as if Rupert had learned how this was done and taught his people.

"Whom did you expect?" he asked.

"Peters. He is a fool, but he has pluck. Some pluck is needed when one tries to blackmail me!"

"I imagine Peters will come later, but not to bargain with you," Marston said dryly. "We have some grounds for believing he means to sell you to the Government."

Rupert's glance got very keen. "Ah," he said, "this is interesting! Perhaps it explains your visit, which rather puzzled me."

"Before long you will get some fresh news," Wynd-

ham interposed. "Larrinaga and the German colonel, with two or three companies of *cazadores,* have landed and are marching for your village."

For a few moments Rupert did not move and his face was inscrutable. Then he looked up and the red veins in his eyes were very plain.

"Is this true? You will find it dangerous to cheat me!"

Wyndham told him what they had found out and stated the conclusions they had drawn. When he stopped Rupert nodded.

"It looks plausible; you are cleverer than my spies, but we will wait. If the soldiers have landed, I will soon know."

"You may wait too long!"

"If there's a risk, you share it," said Rupert meaningly. "You were rash when you came to see me without being asked. However, the entrance of the lagoon is shallow and the surf is often bad. Can Larrinaga find the channel?"

"Pepe, the pilot, is with him. I expect he'll steer the tug."

"Ah!" said Rupert. "I rather trusted Pepe, but he has been bribed. Well, it is possible he will get his reward. However, I imagine you have made some plans for me."

Wyndham braced himself. Although luck had given him strong arguments, Rupert was bold and cunning. Since his situation looked desperate, he might try some desperate remedy that would ruin them all. He must be persuaded to use the obvious way of escape.

"You can't fight; it's too late," he said. "If you

start now and we push across the hills between the two columns, we may cross one detachment's line after they have passed. When they find out you have gone, we will have got a start and ought to travel faster than loaded soldiers. The schooner is ready and would sail in a few minutes after we got on board. I don't see another plan, and if you're caught Larrinaga will shoot you. His men are well equipped and drilled. He has been getting ready for some time."

Rupert pondered for a minute or two, and the others waited anxiously. Then he said, "If I go, I leave people who trusted me in Larrinaga's power. It is not a very heroic exit."

"Does this count for much?"

"On the whole, it does not," said Rupert coolly. "After all, my followers can take care of themselves. They are an elusive lot and Don Ramon would soon wear out his troops hunting them in the bush. All the same, to slink away is something of an anti-climax."

"We didn't run a big risk in order to help you save your dignity," Wyndham rejoined, and Rupert gave him a mocking smile.

"Your object's plain and I owe you nothing. You hope to mend the family's fortunes, and see an awkward chance of its getting known that a leader of negro rebels is your relation. However, what do you reckon to do with me if I go? You proposed, another time, that I should return to England."

"We don't propose it now. We'll land you at an American port and I will try to pay you a small allowance so long as you stay in the United States. The South might suit you and one could trust the Americans to see you didn't make trouble there."

"For guests, you take a bold line. It's rather strange you imagine I'm forced to agree. You don't seem to understand that there's not much to prevent my leaving you here and going off with your yacht."

"We thought about this," Wyndham replied. "If we don't return by a stipulated time, *Columbine* will sail and carry a statement I left with the mate to the British officers at Kingston, Jamaica. The cable is ready for slipping, the sails are loose, and if strangers try to board her, the boat will go to sea."

"One must approve your caution," said Rupert dryly. "Well, I think my plans were good, and but for two things they might have been carried out. Our robbing Father Sebastian's church forced Larrinaga to move, but I was not responsible for this. The other's more important and the mistake was mine." He turned to Marston as he went on: "When you were ill with fever I ought to have poisoned you. Instead I tried a cure civilized doctors would hesitate to use."

"Ah!" said Marston, "you saved my life?"

"I don't want thanks. To some extent, I thought it policy. It did not seem worth while to bother about your antagonism then. Afterwards, when we tried to drown you, we were too late. You had persuaded your partner; your work was done. If you had not meddled, I'd have led him where I wanted."

"I think that is so, Bob. I owe you much," Wyndham interposed.

"If Harry had brought me the supplies I needed, I could have fought the President's troops," Rupert resumed, fixing his bloodshot eyes on Marston. "Well, you spoiled the plot, and if I'm beaten now, it is not Larrinaga but you who wins. You ought to be

flattered. For such a man as you are, it's a remarkable victory!"

There was something sinister in his sneering voice and Wyndham said sharply, "It will be prudent for you to see Bob does not fall ill again. If I meet with any misfortune, he will make you accountable."

Rupert shrugged. "We will let it go and wait until news about the soldiers arrives. In the meantime, I have some preparations to make. You can sleep until I come back. Nobody will disturb you."

"I have a pistol, but don't expect to use it," Wyndham replied. "Your need of our help is our best protection, and so long as the need is obvious I think we are pretty safe."

When Rupert went out they lay down on the mats. Although they were near physical exhaustion, it was impossible to sleep. The tension they had borne had not relaxed, because until the news of the soldiers' advance was signalled the situation was not free from danger. The tug might strand among the shoals, a strong breeze and breaking surf might stop her entering the lagoon to land the troops, and delay would give Rupert time to form fresh plans. Marston did not trust him yet. If Rupert could escape without their help, he would not leave them at liberty to meddle again.

They heard nothing from outside and the hut was very quiet. The silence began to wear Marston's nerve. He could not wait much longer, but it might be rash to go out, and he forced himself to smoke, although the tobacco burned his tongue and his mouth was parched. It looked as if Rupert were not coming back. Perhaps he had cheated them and gone off

alone. Marston pictured his malicious grin as he stole off through the bush and left them to wait for Larrinaga.

At length, however, Rupert returned to the hut. "I have got news," he said coolly. "Your boys are ready and we will start. Father Sebastian is an embarrassment; you will see that we cannot leave him behind."

"Send for him," said Wyndham. "You had better understand that I'm accountable for his safety."

Father Sebastian came in, and Wyndham asked if he would promise to say nothing about their visit and departure with the Bat.

"No," said Father Sebastian, "I will not promise. I do not know what is happening, but it looks as if the punishment this man deserves were overtaking him. I will not help him to escape."

"You are in his power yet," Wyndham remarked.

Father Sebastian smiled. "I am an old man and my work in the dreary swamps is hard. My life is not worth much; there are things I value more."

"I was wrong," said Wyndham quietly. "However, since you refuse, we must take you with us as far as the coast. It would help if you promised not to run away."

"I will run away, if it is possible. This man is bad and cruel; I think he killed your agent, and now he is stealing off, the soldiers must be coming. I will warn them if I can."

"After all, is this your business? You are a missionary," Wyndham urged.

"I am the Church's servant and a citizen of the country the Bat defies. Perhaps its rule is corrupt,

but it is better than his. Its citizens are Christians and follow the light, although their steps are sometimes weak; these others would plunge the land in the dark of superstitious horror. I know, I have long watched the shadow deepen."

"You are a loyal servant," Wyndham replied. "I am afraid you must come with us, but we will try to make your journey easy."

"White man fool man! Black man fix them thing different," Rupert remarked with his cruel grin. Then he indicated Marston and added in good English: "This fellow is certainly a fool, but his boyish scruples have beaten my cleverest schemes."

He signed them to go out. The Krooboys from the schooner were waiting, and in a few minutes the party plunged into the woods.

CHAPTER XI

THE BAT'S EXIT

COLUMBINE rolled heavily on the broken swell and the lamp that swung from a beam threw a puzzling light about the cabin. Now and then water splashed on the deck and the slack sails flapped. The fresh breeze had dropped, although the sea had not yet gone down, and Marston had set the topsail and the balloon jib. The light canvas would chafe and was not of much use, but he must reach Kingston as soon as possible. He was exhausted by physical effort and anxious watching, and when Rupert replaced the bandage on his comrade's face he leaned back slackly on the locker seat.

Wyndham lay in an upper berth, in the faint draught that came down through the open skylight. A wet cloth covered his face and the cabin smelt of drugs. He did not move and had not been altogether conscious for some time. Rupert wore Harry's white clothes and looked, in the unsteady light, like a rather haggard and jaundiced Englishman. Marston had noted his firm touch when he fixed the bandage and now he was methodically putting back some bottles in the medicine chest. When he finished he bent over the berth for a moment, as if he listened to Wyndham's breathing.

"I think he will live," he said. "Although he is very weak, we have got the fever down, and the wound

is not as septic as it was. Anyhow, you must get him into hospital at Kingston soon."

Marston remembered afterwards that Rupert had said *you*, not we, and thought it significant. Now, however, he was dully pondering something else.

"If you had not been on board, Harry would not have lived," he said.

"You're puzzled about my saving him?" Rupert rejoined. "Well, I don't owe Harry much and I owe you less. On the whole, I hardly think our relationship accounts for my efforts. A bold experiment is interesting when somebody else is the subject, and one rather enjoys using one's skill."

Since there were only one or two very simple surgical instruments in the medicine chest, Marston thought Rupert's skill was remarkable. He had envied him his firm hand and nerve when he cut out the bullet that had pierced Harry's cheek and jaw and lodged in his neck. As he remembered the operation, in which he had been forced to help, Marston shuddered. After a few moments Rupert looked up.

"You need fresh air. Go and see how she steers. Harry will sleep, but if it's necessary I will watch."

Marston went on deck. It was a little cooler and the touch of the dew on his face was soothing. He put on an oilskin and sat down by the wheel. The night was clear and the tops of the broken swell shone with phosphorescence. *Columbine* rolled about, shaking her masts and booms with savage jerks. Blocks rattled and now and then the canvas banged. Yet she forged ahead and kept her course.

By-and-by Marston lighted his pipe and tried to fix the elusive pictures of their journey to the coast. To

begin with, the night they left the hut Wyndham owned he had a dose of fever. In the morning he was worse, but time was valuable and they pushed on. Then, at evening when they came down from the hills to cut the soldiers' line of march, they saw two or three *peons* run out from a ruined village and plunge into the bush. Another, who was slower and was caught, stated that they had been left behind to wait until some more troops came up. The village was empty, but the *peon* took the party to a hut he had been ordered to watch. It was getting dark and when they went in Marston struck a match. Next moment he let it drop, for a white man lay on the floor and something strange about his attitude indicated that he was dead. Then Rupert picked up the burning match and lighted a lantern.

Marston shuddered as his memory recaptured the scene the dim illumination touched. The dead man had drawn up his legs and his face was distorted, but Marston did not want to remember this. It was Peters' face, and he knew the fellow had not met a peaceful death. Father Sebastian knelt down by the body; Rupert stooped and smiled.

"You cannot help him and I do not think you will find a mark. I doubt if he belonged to any flock, but it was not to yours. Anyhow, he is dead, and you need not bother about how he died."

"Yet you know," said Father Sebastian, fixing him with steady eyes.

Rupert nodded. "He meant to sell me, and it is possible he got his reward, although he did not enjoy it long. One could philosophize about it, but I leave this to you. Well, I think we will not wait until his friends arrive."

"I will wait," said Father Sebastian, firmly. "It is a duty to bury the dead."

Rupert shrugged and looked at Marston. Wyndham, shivering with ague, had sat down and rested his head in his hands, as if he did not know what was going on.

"Watching the *padre* did not run off has cost us some time," Rupert remarked. "However, it would be awkward if he sent the next detachment of *cazadores* after us. I expect he knows how I would meet the difficulty."

"We will leave you and not bother you for a promise," Marston said to Father Sebastian, who gave him his hand.

"There is much that puzzles me and I do not know why you help this bad man to escape, but I feel you are honest," he said. "Sometimes one must trust without understanding." He lifted his hand solemnly. "*Vaya con Dios!*"

Then they went out and left him in the dark with Peters.

Marston did not know if Father Sebastian sent the soldiers after them, but although he thought he did he bore him no grudge. The man was staunch, and from his point of view, was justified. In the morning, Rupert declared they must push on faster, and their march became a race for the coast. Now Marston could think about it coolly, he imagined Rupert feared some of the negroes had joined Larrinaga and were signalling news of the party's flight. Wyndham stumbled as they forced their way savagely in scorching heat across reedy swamps and through tangled bush, but he would not be carried and this would have

delayed them dangerously. Marston recaptured with strange vividness the last scene.

It was dark when they broke out of the forest and saw the sea sparkle under a half-moon. The land-breeze blew fresh, and now and then belts of warm mist trailed across the beach. There were no mangroves, the beach was flat and open, but they were some distance off the spot where the schooner lay and they labored across the soft sand. Marston owned that the suspense had shaken his nerve. He was desperately anxious to get on board before he was stopped, but Wyndham could hardly walk. For half-an-hour Marston dragged him along.

When they were nearly level with the schooner, indistinct figures ran out from the bush. Wyndham turned, and shaking off Marston, drew his pistol. He fired two or three shots, but since the distance was long Marston thought he rather expected to warn the crew than stop their pursuers. The latter did not stop and Marston dragged Wyndham on again. A boat was coming, but he doubted if they could reach it before the others arrived. The sand was soft, he was exhausted, and Wyndham lurched about. Sometimes he nearly pulled Marston down.

Shots were fired behind them and bullets hummed overhead. The negroes were running hard close in front, and the boat plunged into the belt of surf. Then Wyndham fell and pulled Marston over. When he fell Marston got some sand in his eyes and could hardly see. Somebody seized his arm and dragged him to his feet; men were splashing in the foam about the boat. He stuck to Harry but did not know how they got on board. Then he felt the boat plunge and

saw the half-naked Kroos were pulling for their lives. Wyndham leaned against him and Marston felt his jacket getting wet; he afterwards found that it was wet by blood. He put Harry down in the stern-sheets and seized the nearest Krooboy's oar, thrusting while the other pulled.

When they got on board the schooner the sails were going up and nobody else was hit. Marston and Rupert carried Wyndham to the cabin and Marston remembered his horror when they put him in his berth. A glancing bullet, turning over endways, had mangled the lower part of his face.

This, however, was some days since and Marston was getting over the shock. Rupert had told him Harry would live, although he would always wear the scar.

By-and-by Marston got up and walked about the deck. He dared not think about Flora yet; he must navigate *Columbine* to Kingston and get Wyndham into hospital. There was a little more wind now and the damp sails did not shake, but the rolling and lurching stopped the schooner. Although it was important to make Kingston soon, one could do nothing to help their progress and Marston presently returned to the wheel. He waited for a time, because he did not want to talk to Rupert. His shrinking from the fellow had not lessened, but he was very tired and limp, and at length he went down and got into his bunk.

In the morning the breeze was fresh and *Columbine* threw the spray about as she plunged across the white combers. At noon, Marston got his sextant to take the sun and sat for some minutes on the skylight calculating the schooner's position. Then he looked up and saw Rupert.

"I think the wind will hold," said the latter. "When do you expect to arrive?"

Marston told him and added: "You are not on the crew list and since Kingston's a British port we will have to comply with the usual formalities. We must think of a way of accounting for your being on board." He paused and added with a touch of embarrassment: "It may be some time before the doctors let me take Harry home and I don't know ——"

"You don't know what to do about me?" Rupert suggested with the smile Marston disliked. "Well, suppose you wait until you get there. I imagine I won't bother you much. In the meantime, you haven't hauled your patent-log. Let's see what distance it marks."

Columbine's log was old-fashioned. In order to read the dial it was necessary to bring the torpedo-shaped instrument on board, and Rupert, jumping on a grating, put his foot on the low taffrail as he began to haul the line. The line was long, the log, with its spiral vanes, offered some resistance, and Marston, knowing it would be a minute or two before Rupert lifted it out of the water, studied the compass. Looking round, he saw the other's bent figure outlined against the foaming wake; and then he glanced ahead. The wind was fresh and *Columbine* sailed fast. White combers rolled up to windward and as she plunged across their tops she threw up clouds of spray.

In about a minute, Marston looked aft again and braced himself as he gazed at the slanted rail. He had heard no splash or cry, but Rupert had gone. He shouted, and signed to the Kroo steersman, who pulled round the wheel. *Columbine* shipped some water as,

with sails flapping and banging, she came head to wind. The long booms jerked, blocks and ropes whipped to and fro, and the crew began to run about the deck. One or two hauled down the foresail, one or two trimmed the jibs aback, and Marston helped the others at the Burton tackle to hoist out the gig.

He jumped on board as she took the water. Four excited negroes leaped down from the schooner's bulwarks, and a white sea washed across the bows as they shoved her off. They got away without damage, and pulled obliquely to leeward while Marston tried to calculate how far *Columbine* had gone since he last saw Rupert. It was necessary to be accurate, because, except when the combers picked up the boat, he could see nothing but the white tops of the waves. Besides, rowing on an angry sea is hard and the men would soon get exhausted. Since they could not search long, he must reach the proper spot.

No floating object tossed among the foam, and after half an hour he gave it up. Rupert Wyndham had gone; he was old, and a good swimmer could not have lived long in such a sea, because a man, buffeted by breaking waves, may drown before he sinks. The boat had shipped much water, the crew were worn out, and had some trouble to row back to *Columbine*. When they had hoisted in the gig and put the schooner on her course, Marston went to the cabin and mixed a drink. He was wet, his hands shook, and his arms ached, for he had been forced to use his strength while he labored with the big sculling oar.

Moreover, he was strangely disturbed. He had shrunk from Rupert Wyndham with half-instinctive repulsion. In one sense, Rupert's drowning would relieve him and Wyndham from an awkward respon-

sibility. Marston admitted that he had recognized this, although he hoped he had not allowed it to influence him. Indeed, because he did not like Rupert, he had made sterner efforts to reach the spot where he had gone overboard; but he wondered whether he had perhaps afterwards neglected means he might have used had the man been his friend. On the whole, he did not think so, and his tormenting doubts began to vanish. For all that, he was glad Wyndham was asleep.

When, some hours later, Marston went back to the cabin Wyndham's eyes were open. The lower part of his face was covered by the bandage and he could not talk, but Marston thought he missed Rupert and was curious. Although Harry was very weak, Marston felt he had better tell him now. If he did not, his unsatisfied curiosity might keep him restless and bring the fever back.

"I know what you want to ask," he said quietly. "Rupert's not here. He fell overboard when he was hauling up the log."

Wyndham's eyelids flickered and his hand moved under the blanket, but this was the only sign he gave.

"She was rolling," Marston went on. "He stood with his foot on the taffrail, leaning out to gather in the line. You see, there was nothing to save him if he lost his balance ——"

He stopped, for he saw Wyndham was looking at him very hard. Then he resumed: "I think he did lose his balance, but I don't know. I was looking forward, wondering whether we ought to haul down a reef, and none of the boys saw him fall. There was not a splash."

A feeble movement of Wyndham's head urged him to go on.

"We got the gig over soon, but the boat had been going fast and head-reached some distance when we brought her round. Then there was a confused sea."

Marston saw Wyndham understood; he need not labor his explanation, but he wished Harry could talk. There was an assurance he wanted his comrade to give; Harry knew how he had felt about Rupert.

"I think I did my best," he said awkwardly. "She nearly capsized once or twice; the sea was hollow and curled before you expected. The water on board was getting deep, and we couldn't bale."

A very faint smile flickered in Wyndham's eyes and Marston was conscious of keen relief. Harry had understood his embarrassment and was satisfied. To hint at regret would be useless cant; there was nothing more to be said. For all that, Marston was glad when a Krooboy called him on deck. It was blowing fresher and he gave some orders and occupied himself by shortening sail.

CHAPTER XII

THE FRESH START

DUSK had fallen and rows of lights twinkled along the walls at the river-mouth. Tall chimneys and warehouses rose against the sky, there was a biting wind, and Marston shivered at the door of the liner's smoking-room. Her engines throbbed slackly as she steamed in with the tide, past the dark shapes of anchored vessels. A mile or two ahead, bright streaks, in which the separate lights were merged, marked the landing stages, and Marston looked for the red, white, and green triangle that would indicate

the company's tug. For his comrade's sake, he was illogically relieved because he could not see her yet, although the moment he dreaded could not be put off long.

After a time, he went back into the smoking room. Wyndham, wearing a heavy coat, lounged on a settee. He was very thin and his face was haggard, but this was not all. His mouth was distorted, for one side drooped, giving him a strange look of vacant amusement. The contrast between this and the melancholy in his eyes was rather horrible. Marston was getting used to the disfigurement, but he had seen that strangers were jarred. Besides, Wyndham would never again articulate clearly. His talk was slow and awkward, and the Kingston doctor doubted if he would altogether get back his strength.

"Ten minutes yet; I don't see the tug," said Marston. "Shall I help you out on deck when she comes?"

Wyndham smiled and answered with the deliberation he was forced to use: "There wouldn't be much use in that, Bob. I heard them fixing the big gangway lights."

Marston knew he was thinking about Flora and the shock she must get. It was going to be hard for Flora; in fact, it was hard for both.

"She knows," he said quietly. "I was frank with Mabel and told her all before the doctor would let you write."

"Thanks! Flora has pluck, but the pluck that hides a hurt does not cure it."

"It goes some way," said Marston. "When Flora sees you, I don't think she will see the scar."

Then one or two of the passengers came in, and they waited until the engines stopped and they heard the

tug's paddles. Wyndham got on his feet awkwardly and waved back Marston, who had meant to give him his arm. His face was very pinched, but his eyes were bright, and as they went out he forced a smile.

A big electric lamp hung from the spar-deck and threw down a searching light. The tug's gangway was run out and people began to come on board. Marston saw Mabel and his heart beat with mixed emotions as he noted her black dress, for a cablegram had told him Mrs. Hilliard was dead. He was unselfishly sorry for Mabel, but she had met the last claim of duty and he had waited long.

Then Flora stepped down from the gangway and went straight across the deck to Wyndham, who stood under the lamp. The strong light touched their faces and Marston imagined the corners of Flora's mouth twitched. This was all; her step was swift and eager and her eyes shone with tender welcome. She was very brave. Marston saw no pity in her look; there was nothing but gladness and love.

"My dear!" she cried, and Wyndham took her in his feeble arms.

A few moments afterwards Mabel gave Marston her hand and when he had gazed at her his glance rested on her black dress.

"I'm sorry. Very sorry; I think you understand!"

"I know, Bob," said Mabel. "You thought about me; you don't think much about yourself. But I must speak to Harry."

She left him and he was filled with tenderness and pride as he watched her greet Wyndham. Her smile was frank and her voice was sympathetic, but one got no hint of pity that might jar a sensitive nerve. Mabel struck the right note, and Marston knew it was not all

good-breeding that guided her. He loved her for the human kindness she gave his comrade.

When they went down the gangway Wyndham was forced to lean on Marston's arm. A car was waiting at the floating bridge that led to the pier-head and Marston helped Wyndham in.

"I'll go to the office early and report to you in the evening," he said. "You must take things easy and not bother at all."

Flora and Chisholm got in and when they drove off Marston took Mabel's hand.

"If you don't mind, we'll walk to the top. I want to look about and realize I'm at home. I feel like a boy who has just come back from his first term at school."

"Was it very hard, Bob?" Mabel asked, sympathetically.

Marston smiled. "It was foreign, if you understand, and that was worse. Plots, gloom, sickness, and mystery that made you savage because you didn't know if you were being cleverly cheated or not. Sometimes I half believed the Bat was a magician. In fact, it was all from which a sober fellow revolts."

"Yet you were strong enough to carry out the job you hated. That is much, Bob."

Marston looked down the river. Long rows of lights pricked out the dock walls that narrowed to a dark gap in the distance. Low constellations marked the ferry landing stages, and in the stream other lights, colored green and red, moved swiftly up and down. In the background were misty towers and spires. Whistles shrieked and one heard the splash of paddles and the throb of propellers, for the commerce of two cities floated up on the tide. Bob's imagination was

sometimes dull, but the river noises moved him then. He got a hint of ordered effort and useful activity. Sober men brought home the ships and controlled the trade that extended across the world. Perhaps, if one looked for it with understanding, there was a romance about this far-spread trade, but of one kind of romance Bob had had enough.

"We will go to the car," he said presently, with quiet happiness. "I've got back and you are with me. I have all I want. Coming up channel, my satisfaction was half spoiled; the trouble waiting Flora haunted me. Then, to some extent, I felt I hadn't justified her trust. I'd promised to see Harry out, and I brought him home like that."

"If you had not been very staunch, he might not have come home at all. But will he always be disfigured?"

"The mark of the bullet won't wear off and he will never talk easily. For the rest, the Kingston doctor wasn't very encouraging. He said Harry had obviously borne a crushing strain for long, and now it had broken him, we mustn't look for a quick recovery. Still he was young and proper treatment in England would help. Well, his meeting Flora is over and I've got rid of a load."

"You ought not to have been afraid for Flora."

"I see this now; she was wonderful," Marston agreed. "Human nature's rather mixed and some is pretty base metal, but you feel that Flora's almost without alloy."

Mabel smiled. "I like you when you're romantic, Bob; but even then you're cautious."

"Oh, well," said Marston. "After all, I only know one girl who is pure gold."

"Now you're quite extravagant, but you're very nice indeed," Mabel replied, and their car rolled up.

Next evening Mabel went with Bob to Wyndham's small house. Wyndham, looking pale and jaded, occupied an easy chair by the fire and Mabel ordered him not to get up.

"I have been to the office and all is going well," Marston remarked. "Next week you can come down for perhaps an hour a day. We won't need you longer and I mean to be firm. Nevis tells me he won't stay. I imagine he doesn't approve my methods, but I'd rather expected this and think I've got a better man."

"If you're satisfied ——" said Wyndham, smiling. "Since Nevis began at the office, I suppose you feel he belongs to the old state of things."

Marston looked half embarrassed, but nodded. "I did feel something like that. A new man is better when you make a fresh start on another line. However, I'm not going to bother about business; I've told you enough to put your mind at rest. There's something much more important, Mabel has agreed to marry me next month."

Flora kissed Mabel and for a time they engaged in happy talk. Then Marston got up.

"We are going to the drawing-room. It's a long time since I heard good music and Mabel said she'd play."

"I didn't know you liked music much, Bob," Flora remarked.

"All the same, I do like it," Marston rejoined. "It's true I've been to concerts that bored me; but all music's charming when Mabel plays."

Flora let them go and then looked at Wyndham. "A wedding present's the next thing, Harry, and it

will need some thought. What can we give them, who have given us so much?"

Wyndham smiled. "I imagine Bob would be content with our gratitude, although he'd feel badly embarrassed if you made it too plain." His smile, however vanished as he resumed: "Anyhow, I shall never wipe out my debt. There are not many like Bob."

He mused for a few moments and went on: "I remember his telling me Rupert was drowned. My face was bandaged; I couldn't speak and was too weak to move. Bob could only see my eyes, and as he watched them I knew what he thought. Because he had hated Rupert from the beginning, he was desperately anxious to persuade me he had done his best. The thing was, of course, ridiculous. Bob being the man he is, one could not doubt him. It was unthinkable to imagine he had not used every effort, although the sea was rough and he risked a capsize. The boat was half swamped when he brought her back. Yet I imagine he was more disturbed than me."

"I think Bob did not see him fall overboard?"

"No," said Wyndham. "Rupert may have lost his balance, but I doubt. We were not far from Kingston and when we got there he must, so to speak, resume a white man's responsibilities and begin life again. He had lived like a savage, commanding fear and using power that few civilized rulers know; but all that had gone and he was proud."

"But you were disturbed when Bob told you," Flora urged.

"At first, I was conscious of relief. I thought Rupert had seen the only way out of the tangle. Before he went, I'd begun to feel the situation was im-

possible for us all. Afterwards, I saw that my greedy ambition had helped to involve us and he had borne the punishment. Had he not thought he could get supplies from me, he would not have plotted the rebellion."

Flora hesitated for a moment, and then said, "When Bob came in the morning to ask if you had slept, I kept him a few minutes and we talked about this. He declared your engaging to supply the goods was not important, because if you had refused, Rupert could have got all he needed from Peters or somebody else, so long as he was willing to give a high price."

"It's possible. After all, Bob is cleverer than people sometimes think, and I see an explanation for Peters' vindictive pursuit: I'd stopped his trading with Rupert and refused him for a partner. Well, he paid, and Rupert paid, and I owe my escape to Bob."

"You made reparation," said Flora gently.

"I tried; when I was found out. It was rather late then, and Bob carried much of the load. But I did not get off free. I spent days of torment, thinking about what you must bear, before I resigned myself to coming home, broken in body, to be a burden to you."

Flora's eyes shone. "Oh, my dear! You have come home and that's all that matters. Besides, you'll get well in England; your strength will return."

"It may be long," said Wyndham quietly. "I cannot grumble for myself; I'm thinking about Bob. It looks as if he must carry my load and his, but he won't growl. He's strong and his pluck's unbreakable. Pluck and honesty like Bob's are worth more than talent."

He paused, and smiled when he resumed: "Well, while I try not to lose patience, waiting, and wonder-

ing whether I'll be fit to work again, he'll build a new Wyndhams' on a surer foundation than I could have laid. I can see him, stopping now and then with his puzzled look, but not stopping long. Bob's way is to go on, straight and steadfastly."

"We owe him much," said Flora. "Your debt is mine."

Then there were steps in the passage and the others came in. Mabel blushed when she saw Flora's smile.

"After all, it looks as if music did bore Bob," Flora remarked. "We didn't hear you playing long."

"We talked," said Mabel, with a frank glance. "There was much to talk about and all was rather wonderful. Perhaps this looks extravagant, but I don't think it is."

"Hold fast to your persuasion," said Flora gently. "It will take you far. Love conquers many doubts and troubles."

"Mabel's troubles ought not to be numerous," Wyndham interposed. "She is going to marry my partner; the best man I know."

Marston's face got red, but Mabel laughed, a soft, happy laugh.

"I really think Bob stands alone," she said. "He's like nobody else and I'm sure there's nobody like him."

THE END

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